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MAKING GOOD

A STORY OF NORTH WEST CANADA

BY

CAPTAIN G. B. M'KEAN, V.C.

Author of "Scouting Thrills"

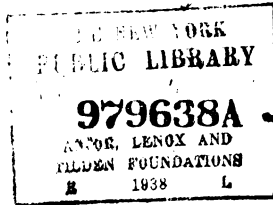
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CHAPTER I

ON BOARD THE SCHOONER *JERSEY*

JACK YOUNG stood contemplating the sailing schooner *Jersey* as it lay in dock at Bristol. The name appealed to him, for *Jersey* had been his home for the sixteen years of his life. He had not run away from home; the old homestead had been sold a few weeks ago on the death of his father, and his mother had gone to make her home with an older brother, so Jack, with an inborn love of the sea, had decided to seek adventure and a living on its wide, rolling spaces. He walked over to the *Jersey* and found it agog with life—it was going out on the tide that night. Presently the huge figure of a man came down the gangway, and as he stepped on to the dock Jack walked over to him.

“Excuse me, sir,” he said, “but is there any chance of a job on your boat?”

The man stopped, turned suddenly, and stood looking down at Jack for several seconds, then slowly removed his pipe from his mouth.

"Who are you?" he jerked out in gruff tones.

"Jack Young, sir, from Jersey."

"H'm," growled out the man, who happened to be the captain of the *Jersey*, "so you want to go to sea, do you?"

"Yes, sir," replied Jack, "that's why I came to Bristol, and seeing that your boat was named the *Jersey*, I thought I'd like to start my life as a sailor on her."

"Well, my lad, I do want a cabin boy as it happens. If your mind's made up, just follow me;" saying which the captain turned and walked back up the gangway. Jack followed him, his heart palpitating with excitement, for now he was fairly launched on the big adventure of life and in the career that he had dreamed of from his earliest years.

Let us take a good look at Jack Young as he stood in the captain's cabin listening to the details of his duties as cabin boy. He was tall for his age, clean-limbed, and with a healthy complexion, the result of an active outdoor life on his father's old homestead in Jersey. His hair was fair, and there was always a merry twinkle in his blue eyes. His confident bearing gave the impression of a boy accustomed to responsibility and ready to deal with any emer-



gency. He was a manly, attractive-looking youngster, and his looks pleased the captain, a man difficult to please even in his most amiable moods.

"Now, my lad," he was saying to Jack, "I want no shirkin'. 'Work' is my middle name, and if ever I catch you tryin' to dodge it, you'll wish you'd never left *your* Jersey to come aboard *mine*."

This abrupt and somewhat brutal speech of the captain's rather dismayed Jack, but he was soon to learn that the life of cabin boy on board a sailing schooner was not quite the same as he had pictured it. Furthermore, he had been unfortunate in signing on with a captain who was a notorious bully, and who took a malicious pleasure in making life on board his vessel as unbearable as he possibly could. Desertions from his ship were frequent, and his evil reputation made it difficult for him to get together a decent crew. He was of a type fortunately rarely found nowadays among merchant skip-pers—one who believed more in the efficacy of a rope's end than of a kind word.

"Now, my lad," he concluded, at the same time opening the door of his cabin, "you follow me and I'll introduce you to your ship-

mates, as fine a bunch of rogues and cutthroats as you'd ever wish to see, but they'll soon find that 'Bully Blair,' as they kindly call me, can manhandle any three of 'em.

"Here you, Jones," he called as a tall, well-built sailor passed them, "here's a new kid I've taken on for this voyage; just find him a hammock. He says he wants to go to sea, but I shouldn't be surprised if he's been kicked out of his home an' thinks a sailor's life's a picnic."

As the captain walked away Jack found himself looking up into the cheery, good-natured face of the sailor Jones.

"Hello, kid," he said genially, "glad to meet you. Just come along of me an' I'll fix you up. What's your name, kid?" he asked as they walked away together.

"Jack Young," replied Jack cheerfully, his heart going out in instant friendship to this tall, good-natured sailor.

"A nice-soundin' name, kid. Mine's Jones—Joe Jones. Down this way, an' mind the step."

Presently they reached the crew's quarters, a not very cheery place.

"Here, kid, sit down on this chest an' tell me something about yourself, for I ain't disguising

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the fact that I'm plumb sorry for you, for this boat, from the captain downward, is a-carrying as low-down a bunch of thugs as you'd meet in a day's march."

Jack told the friendly and sympathetic Jones his short life history.

"That's pretty rough on you, kid," he remarked sympathetically when Jack had finished, "having to leave your home so soon an' start out to paddle your own canoe afore you scarcely knows how to handle it. Still, there's nothing like beginning on your own when you're young. Now take meself for instance: I was cow-punching in Texas when I was your age; in fact, I grew up on a ranch, but I got restless an' began wandering, and finally I became a kind of half-baked sailor-man. In knocking around I've met with some real tough guys in my time, men who, if you looked cross at 'em, would draw on you, an' I've sailed along of some tough old crews; but let me tell you, kid, that I'm powerful pleased to have you for a shipmate, for you're about the first white man I've met since I came aboard this boat. Seeing that we understand each other, and knowing that you'll treat this as confidential, I don't mind telling you that, once

back on the other side, I'm terminating my contract with all possible speed and without bidding the captain a loving farewell."

"Well, I can't say that you sound very encouraging," remarked Jack laughingly.

"Well, I should be sorry to discourage you, kid, but I've crossed over on this boat an' I'm only a-stayin' on it until I get back, for I sure believe that a reptile would side-step to get out of the way of some of the rogues aboard this boat. And without wishing to say mean things behind his back, I believe that this skipper has got 'em all licked for murderous instincts. Not that I'm altogether condemning him, for you can't treat the roughnecks aboard this boat in exactly the same way as you'd treat a Sunday-school class. But now I must be going, kid. Don't you worry," he concluded cheerily, patting Jack on the shoulder, "I'm not scared of any of 'em, and I'll keep an eye on you."

Jones then went out to assist in getting the schooner under way, and Jack was left alone for a few minutes. This was a big change from the quiet, hard-working life on the Jersey homestead and, as was quite natural, he felt a bit lonely and strange. In all the bright, romantic pictures his vivid imagination had painted for

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him, he had never once found a place in them for anything resembling what he was now actually experiencing. And it was as well that he had not, or it would have spoiled many otherwise happy hours.

It was Jack's first test, and his cheery optimism and self-confidence brought him through it with flying colors. The slightly dejected look on his face as he sat, with clasped hands, leaning forward and looking out into the gathering gloom slowly gave way to a look of determination, then a smile played on his face, and finally he commenced whistling a cheery tune. Then he felt the schooner moving—there was no turning back now! He was leaving behind him home and friends, and as he thought of all this meant to him the whistling stopped and a big lump came into his throat. He gulped it down and bravely whistled the same cheery tune.

"That's the stuff, my son," called out Jones as he burst cheerily into the fo'c's'le, "keep that spirit up an' you'll make good wherever you go. But hurry along to the captain's cabin, for he's calling for you and you'd better try to keep in the old man's good books. He's a reg'lar tartar if he thinks you're 'tryin' to double-cross him."

But Jack was gone before Jones had finished talking, for he was desperately anxious to please his new employer. He knocked at the captain's cabin door, and was greeted with a scowl when he entered.

"Come, my lad," said the captain, "don't you be goin' and forgettin' the advice I gave you. I want no shirkin' an' I take no excuses. Now get me a cup of strong coffee."

Jack hurried out to find the captain's cook—a Chinaman.

"Hello, you new clabin boy, eh?" said the genial Chinaman.

"Yes, that's me," replied Jack; "a cup of strong coffee for the captain."

"Velly good, velly good;" then, "capitan's velly bad man to boys," shaking his head mournfully and eying Jack sympathetically.

"Oh, he seems all right, John."

But John shook his head as much as to say, "ah, but you just wait and see; you may think so to-day, but wait until to-morrow."

After Jack had delivered the coffee he was bidden, in gruff tones, "to get out of my sight and have a sleep."

The schooner was now gliding smoothly down the Bristol Channel, the night being fine with

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a light and favorable breeze blowing. Jack returned to the crew's quarters and found them crowded with seamen whom he had not previously seen. In one corner he saw his friend Jones busily engaged in a game of poker with three other sailors. He walked over and immediately received a cheery greeting from Jones.

"Captain in a good humor to-night, kid?"

"Not bad," replied Jack, "but he looks the kind of man that could knock things about a bit if he took the notion."

"You're right there," returned Jones with emphasis, "a dog sufferin' with rabies is a reg'lar cooin' dove compared to the old man when he's in a rage." Then Jones gave his attention to the game in hand while Jack took a look at his shipmates. They were an unkempt, un-English looking crowd, and Jack could better understand the force of some of Jones's remarks. They were anything but a Sunday-school class, and the skipper's bullying method was probably the one they were most likely to understand. Jack thought it very doubtful whether they would have been at all favorably impressed by gentler treatment.

He next turned his attention to the three card companions of Jones. One of them, by his

looks and speech, was obviously a German, while the other two were Russians. Their cruel, greedy eyes never left the piles of money by their sides. They played the game with a fierce intentness, and, as Jack had been quick to observe previously, they angrily resented any interruption. Jones was losing, but his good humor never failed him, and he had a jocular remark to make about every hand played, whether it had been a winning or a losing one. At last he picked up a hand which seemed to please him, and he steadily increased his bets until the German was the only other bettor. He had raised the bet another shilling when Jack saw one of the other two slip a card to the German.

He immediately jumped to his feet.

"Say, Jones," he called out, "they're cheating you. I saw that man there pass him a card."

There was an immediate uproar.

"Dat kid's a liar!" called out the German; "he knows noding about dis game."

"He's not a liar," shouted back Jones; "it's you that's a liar, an' a dirty thief in the bargain."

They were all on their feet now and talking

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excitedly. The German edged over toward Jack, aimed a swift blow at him, and knocked him down. Jones's blood was up, and he promptly stretched out the German, only to be attacked by the other two men.

Jack got up on to his feet determined to help Jones, when he saw the German get up and reach for a bottle. He raised it and aimed a blow at Jones's head that would have laid his skull open had it got home, when Jack dashed in and took the blow on his arm.

Jones had dealt speedily and effectively with the other two men, and now turned his attention to the German who, seeing how things were going, was beating a hasty retreat through the doorway. Jones then turned to Jack with outstretched hand.

"Put it there, kid. I saw what you did. You took a blow that was meant for me and saved me from a broken skull at the least, and I won't forget it. Sit down here," indicating an old box. "I'm sorry all this happened, an' I ought to know better than to play cards with thugs like these. But it's just as well for you to know that what's happened is no unusual occurrence. I know I shouldn't mix meself up with 'em, but what's a fellow to do? He can't mope in a cor-

ner. My, but I'm powerful pleased you came aboard, for I sure needed some white man's company! But this is no life for you, kid; it's no life for me, and I reckon I'm tougher than you are. Now I think I know something about how you feel, and the wonderful pictures you've been painting for yourself of a sailor's life, but it don't always pan out. Besides, you've been unlucky in starting aboard the *Jersey*, for it's a real tough life we live, and unfitted for a boy like you. Now I'm going to make a proposition to you for you to think over. What about coming West with me when we hit into Halifax, the port the *Jersey's* bound for?"

"Well, that's kind of you, and I'll think it over," replied Jack. "You see, I'd like to try this kind of life, for I've always had a longing to be a sailor."

"That's all right, you think it over. Now you just turn in for a sleep, for you'll have to be up bright an' early in the mornin'. Whatever you do, don't get into the old man's black books if you can help it. That will only make bad worse."

Jack was only too pleased to turn in. The time that had passed since he had left Jersey

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had been full of novel and strange experiences, which had culminated in the exciting fight in which he had taken a part. He was also impressed with the fact that he could make his life bearable in his present surroundings only by giving no cause for complaint.

It was still dark when he woke up with strange and sickly sensations. The schooner was now fairly out at sea and was rolling considerably. Jack was at a loss to understand what was wrong with him. The smells from the cook's galley adjoining were nauseating; he was suffocating, he must get out in the open—a breath of air and he would be quite all right. So he dropped out of his hammock to the floor, staggered to the doorway, and up the steps leading to the deck. He felt faint and dizzy, but was revived by the strong breeze blowing. It was a blustering, dirty night and the tossing waters looked menacing and unfriendly. But the strong, reviving breeze, how thankful he was for it! All was quiet on deck. The wind filled the towering sails, and the *Jersey* was making good progress. Presently the faint light of dawn appeared, and the indistinguishable things gradually took shape. He thought he recognized the figure at the wheel, well pro-

tected in oilskins. Yes, it was Jones, so he decided to go over and have a chat with him.

"Hello, Jones," he called out, "want any help?"

Jones turned his head, and a bright, welcoming smile lit up his face.

"Hello, kid," he answered cheerily, "climb up alongside an' let's have the news."

Jack scrambled up and joined him.

"Up early this morning, eh! Has the old man been after you?"

"No; woke up feeling a bit queer, so thought a breath of air would do me good," replied Jack.

"Oh, so that's your trouble, eh?" continued Jones, laughing heartily. "Well, you'll feel worse yet, kid, afore you feel better. We all go through it, and it's no joke, I know; but fight it down if you can, for the old man's a holy terror if you're not always on the job."

"Oh, I'll soon be all right," replied Jack jauntily, though his looks rather belied his words.

"Of course you will. I wanted to see you to put you on your guard, for those dagos we had the mix-up with are powerful treacherous, an'

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it'd be wise to keep on the lookout. They don't fight fair like a white man, an' you need a pair of eyes in the back of your head to watch for all they're up to."

"Thanks for the hint," replied Jack, "I'll be on the lookout."

After a few minutes he left Jones and went along to the galley of the captain's cook. The excellent little Chinaman was busily preparing the captain's breakfast.

"H'm, capitan send you 'long for bleakfast, eh?" queried John.

"No, he's still asleep," replied Jack; "be back in a minute, John," he continued, and made a wild rush for the door.

Ugh, how he hated food! Still, he must not give way to the horrible feeling; he must fight it down, as Jones had advised him.

As the day wore on the wind became more blustering, and the schooner tossed and pitched in a way that was alarming to Jack. He felt horribly sick and dizzy, and only got through his work by the greatest effort. At night he crawled into a corner of the fo'c's'le, too weak to attempt to get into his hammock, and was soon asleep from sheer exhaustion and fatigue.

The next morning he struggled to his feet, determined to fight it out with nature, but nature easily assumed the mastery and Jack lay beaten. Jones came over to him.

"Say, kid, can't you pull your oar to-day? Say so if you can't an' I'll look after the old man for you."

"Sorry," replied Jack, "but I simply can't stand; never felt so ill in all my life."

"Don't you worry," replied the good-natured sailor. "I'll do enough to keep the old man away from you."

Jack thanked him and subsided into the stupor from which Jones had aroused him. The hours passed unheeded by Jack, and he was left undisturbed. The schooner rocked and shook from the steadily growing gale, and the following morning found Jack lying in the same stupor. Toward noon the gale reached its highest pitch, and the sufferings of Jack became more acute. By night, however, the wind had subsided, and Jack had dropped off into a merciful sleep when he was suddenly aroused by a feeling of pain. He awoke—startled to find the captain's form towering over him.

"Come on, you lazy young brat," he roared,

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continuing to kick Jack, "up you get. You can't expect full-grown sailors to be always doing your work."

Jack somehow struggled to his feet, faint and dizzy. He looked so ill that even "Bully Blair" almost repented of his harshness. After he had gone Jack dragged himself up on deck and felt better for the fresh, strong breeze. It was supper time, so he went along to the cook's galley.

"Oh, you came back, eh?" remarked John. "You sick? Oh, velly bad, velly bad. Chinees sick too, no cook capitan's bleakfast, capitan kick Chinees so," making a wild lunge with his foot; "him velly bad man," he concluded.

The next morning Jack felt a little better, though weak.

"The old man treated you pretty rough last night, kid, eh?" queried Jones.

"Rather!" replied Jack. "I can still feel it, but perhaps it did me good, for I am better to-day."

"You'll be all right now; but don't forget what I told you: keep your eye skinned for those dagos. I've turned around quick once or twice and found them skulking suspiciously

behind me. That's the worst of a dago, he can never take a lickin' an' forget it."

It was just before dark, and Jack was leaning over the rail with his face to the strong breeze that was blowing. He was feeling better but still very weak. He was thinking over the offer Jones had made him. Up to the present his life as a sailor had not been a brilliant success. He heard footsteps behind him, and turned in time to see the German and another man slink away. Jones was right, he thought; he'd have to keep a sharp lookout for these men whose enmity he had aroused. His only friend on the schooner was Jones, and he thought what a dismal, dreary, unhappy life it would be if he left, as he said he intended doing. He turned to walk away and saw Jones approaching.

"Hello," called out Jones, "still feeling bad?"

"Oh, not so bad now, thanks," replied Jack. "I've just been thinking what a rotten time I'd have here if you were gone, and it seems to me that the best thing I can do is to go with you."

"Well, I'll be mighty pleased to have your company."

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“Tell me something about your plans, and what life is like on a Western ranch.”

When they separated Jack had quite made up his mind about the future; he would go with Jones and qualify himself, as Jones described it, as a “full-grown cow-puncher.”

CHAPTER II

THE DESERTERS

AFTER Jack had made the decision to accompany his friend Jones to the Canadian Northwest he became more buoyant in spirit, and cheerfully endured the hardships of a sailor's life, the violent temper of the old man, and the company of his undesirable shipmates. At first he did not like the idea of deserting the *Jersey*, but Jones soon disposed of his scruples for him.

"You know," he would say, "company like you are in here is not good for you, an' the captain has no claim on your loyalty. He'd just as soon knock you down as look at you." All of which was quite true, for Jack was indeed having a rough and trying time. He now only longed for the day when the *Jersey* would reach Halifax. The one bright spot in his life was his friendship with Jones, and his happiest hours were spent in listening to the stories the sailor told him of his cowboy days.

Jack, with his passionate love for horses,

reveled in the descriptions that Jones gave of them—horses, more than half wild, that could be conquered only by the greatest skill, perseverance, and patience. And the thrilling descriptions of “round-ups,” of days and nights spent in the saddle, of the herding together of thousands of cattle and steering them for miles across the open prairie, appealed to Jack’s ready imagination.

His first love of the sea was dying quickly, and it could hardly be wondered at after his unfortunate experiences. A desire for the wide spaces of the rolling prairie was growing up within him, and he longed for the time to come when he could quietly slip away from the *Jersey* and start out on the trek to the great West.

At last the town of Halifax, perched on the hill, became distinguishable through the mist hanging over it, and as the *Jersey* entered the smooth waters of its spacious harbor Jack thrilled with the anticipation of the new life ahead of him. The daily talks with Jones had given him a vivid picture of an adventurous, open-air life, and his buoyant spirit could find nothing in it that was not full of brilliant promise. After the *Jersey* had docked it was too late to begin unloading operations that day, so,

after consultation with Jones, it was decided to slip quietly away that night.

"I know it isn't playin' the game to beat it afore the *Jersey's* unloaded," remarked Jones, as he hastily packed a few things into a bundle, "but the skipper hasn't played the game himself; he's never missed an opportunity to cuff you and swear at you, and he don't deserve no better of you than what you are doing." He paused and looked up.

"I suppose you're broke?" he inquired.

"Well, just about," replied Jack. "I've only sixteen shillings and an odd copper or two."

"Well, you've got more than I have, kid. I did have a few pounds when we left Bristol, but lost it playing poker. Take a tip from me: keep away from cards; it's a real mug's game. It doesn't matter how much money you earn, you'll never have a red cent if you dabble in cards. I don't say that everybody that plays cards is a crook, but I do say that everybody that's a crook plays cards, and pretty often it's darned hard to sort 'em out. Besides, you're apt to quarrel and fall out with your best friend over a game, and you never have enough horse sense to stop playing until you're broke. But for you I might have been a dead un, and all

over a game of cards. I hope you don't think I'm preaching at you, but I've taken a great fancy to you, and I'm only telling you a few things for your own good that I know to be true. Now what about it, kid, shall we beat it?"

"Yes, I'm ready when you are," replied Jack. The sailor led the way while Jack, tingling with excitement, followed closely behind. On deck all was quiet, but noises of revelry and drunken brawls came from the brightly lighted saloons adjoining the docks. It was a dirty and undesirable part of the fair city of Halifax, and it was frequented by a very cosmopolitan and quarrelsome crowd. No self-respecting citizen familiar with its reputation was ever to be found haunting its shadowy alleyways, and policemen never patrolled their beat except in pairs. As Jones had said, it was an easy matter to get away from the *Jersey*. He himself was as nimble as a sailor ought to be, and he found a good second in Jack. As they stood on the dock he turned round and whispered to Jack:

"We might as well bodge the dock police, for they most likely will ask awkward questions. We'll make for the railway sidings just behind those houses, and I'll give you your first les-

son on how to travel cheap across the continent when you are broke."

By a little patient waiting, it was an easy matter to dodge the dock police, and in a few minutes they were comfortably seated on the floor of one of the spacious box cars to be found only on the American continent.

"Now," commenced Jones, "our first job is to find a freight express goin' to Montreal, for that is our first stopping place. You see, I've got no money at all, and yours would hardly pay our fare out of sight of Halifax. This is no new game to me, for I've traveled all over the American continent and it has cost me nary a cent. We call it 'bummin' your road,' and you'll be surprised the number of nice, self-respecting folk you meet traveling the same way. I don't say it's always pleasant and that the railroad men exactly shake you by the hand when they meet you, for they've got a nasty habit of stopping the train and dumping you off at all kinds of inconvenient places; but still, if you're lucky and can make yourself look like a bale of cotton goods when they're passing by, you usually get to your destination without a lot of inconvenience.

"Now, you wait here, and I'll pick the best

seat for you on the express." Jones then climbed out of the box car and disappeared into the darkness. He had only been away for a few minutes when Jack heard him approaching, engaged in a heated altercation with some one.

"I'm telling you," he was saying, "that I'm only taking a short cut from the docks to the station."

"Now, you beat it away from here as quick as your long legs will take you," was the reply; "we've heard yarns like yours before, and we're on the lookout for people like you. If you were taking a short cut, why were you so mighty interested in the freight express that's pullin' out to Montreal?" (Jones chuckled inwardly at this last remark, for now he was sure of the destination of the freight train around which he had been caught prowling by one of the railroad officials on duty.)

"Well," retorted Jones angrily, "can't a fellow show a little interest in a freight train without being suspected of wantin' to board it?"

"Sure he can," was the reply, "provided nobody sees him."

They were now passing the box car in which Jack was sheltered, so Jones took advantage to give him a tip.

"I'm enjoyin' your company real fine," he remarked genially; "perhaps you'd like to see me safely on to the station platform?"

"Yes, I would," came back the reply without hesitation; "and whether you're enjoying my company or not, I don't intend to leave you until I see you there."

Jack took the hint, stepped quietly to the ground, and kept Jones and his persistent companion in sight. He crept along in the shadows until he saw that Jones was alone, the other having returned to his duty, and then hurried toward him.

The sailor had a broad grin on his face.

"It's all right," he remarked in a low tone. "I've picked out a good comfortable seat for us in a car loaded with baled hay. I was just returning for you when that chap spotted me and insisted on keeping me company. I tried to give you the tip when we passed the car you were sitting in, and I see you caught on. We're fairly in luck's way, for the engine's already hitched on ready to pull out, and the sooner we get away from Halifax the better. Just follow me, and we'll be on that freight inside of five minutes."

They carefully picked their way back to the

freight train, taking advantage of the darkest places. It was no easy matter to climb into the car, for there were a number of officials carrying lanterns busily engaged around the train.

"Just follow me," Jones whispered; "I'll climb up on to the car and give you a hand up, but we'll have to be slick or else these railway men will get us."

He seized the first opportunity, and ran toward a box car, vaulted lightly into it, and then turned and gave his hand to Jack, who had followed closely behind. The only real space in the car was at the top, so Jones climbed up and then pulled Jack up after him.

"That's fine," said Jones, breathing heavily. "We're on the through express freight train to Montreal, and here's a fine berth on a luxurious sleeping car free of charge! Oh, but this is a great life when you know the ropes. And now for something to eat. It's only a few of these old ship biscuits and a tin of beef I managed to pinch, but washed down with a drink of water out of this flask it'll taste real fine."

"Say, if you've got some water there, for the love of Mike pass it over."

Both Jack and Jones looked up, startled, for, much to their amazement, they found that they

were not alone. Jones was the first to recover.

"Sure," he said cheerily, and passed over the flask. Their new-found companion made no further remark until he had taken a good long drink. He handed the flask back to Jones.

"Don't talk so loud until we get started. I've been lying here since last night, and I wouldn't take it kindly if I got booted out at the last minute."

"All right," whispered Jones, "I was forgetting meself, for I ought to know better."

They all lay quiet, until, about fifteen minutes later, the clanging of the bell on the engine announced the train's immediate departure. There were anxious moments during this period, particularly when several men came to a pause alongside the box car they were in and stood talking, for, as Jones and their new-found companion very well knew, it was not infrequent that a systematic search was made throughout the whole of a train, and then it was surprising to see the amount of excess human freight that was collected out of it and dispersed. They all heaved a sigh of relief when at last the train was in motion, and then Jones immediately set about the preparation of the

evening meal. In reply to an invitation to join them, their new acquaintance said:

"Well, boys, I should certainly say so, seeing that I've had nary a bite of food or a drink of water for nearly two days. It's a real godsend you boys getting on this car, for it'll be the best part of two days afore we git to Montreal."

"Yes," replied Jones, "the food an' drink question is the most inconvenient thing 'bout cheap traveling."

The meal over, they all settled comfortably down for the night. The hay made a nice, soft, comfortable bed, and Jack was soon sleeping soundly. It was daylight when Jones woke him.

"Come on, wake up," he said cheerily; "breakfast is all ready and waiting, and no captain to throw his sea boots at you."

"Righto," replied Jack, sitting up and rubbing the sleep out of his eyes.

"I'm sorry," apologized Jones, "that we've not got much variety on the menu, the only difference in meals being that we call 'em by a different name. For instance, last night's meal was supper, and this one is, as the Chineese cook would call it, 'bleakfast.' "

Jack did not mind this in the least, for the

food on the *Jersey* could not by any means be called dainty, and, besides, he was so thoroughly enjoying these new experiences that he was quite prepared to suffer any incidental hardships. Fortunately it was a warm autumn day, and they were cozy and comfortable. The freight train rattled along at a good speed, and Jack's excitement at the prospect of life on a ranch out West increased with each mile that was covered.

"Say, Jones," he asked, "I would like to hear of some more of your experiences as a cow-puncher."

"Would you?" replied Jones. "Well, we have lots of time to spare, and there's not much to see out of this Pullman, so I'll tell you about one of the wildest but handsomest-looking young mares you would ever wish to see. We ran her into the corral along with a bunch of young horses from the range that we intended to break in to riding. She was a real wild-looking creature, an' I had my eye on her from the first day. She didn't seem to pal on to the rest of the horses, and wouldn't even sniff at the hay we threw in to her. But she was a real beauty to look at—a kind of golden sorrel, and limbs slick an' clean looking. We had no end of

trouble to cut her out from the rest of the bunch and get her into the corral by herself. We had a half-breed Indian named Joe Tatham who did all the roping, for he was about the slickest man at handling a rope that I ever did see. Joe walked into the corral pretty confident, for there wasn't a living thing that Joe wouldn't put his rope over, when the mare turns round, sees him standing there with the rope, and instead of doing her best to get as far away from him as she could, which all of them usually do, she starts toward Joe at a mad gallop, teeth bared like a dog. This was most unexpected, and Joe only just managed to side-step and get out of her way. She wheeled round and came back at him again. This was too much for Joe, so he lost no time in making for the corral fence. She then stood there snorting an' rolling her eyes as if defying the rest of creation to master her. In a few minutes Joe was back in the corral—not on foot this time, but on the back of a pony. He didn't waste much time before he dropped his rope over her and threw her on her back. Two or three of us ran in, tied her, and strapped a stock saddle on her back. And then started some fun, for every man on the ranch tried to stay on her back, but she threw

us all. Three of us she put clean over the corral fence, she broke the leg of 'Broncho Jim,' one of the best riders on the range, and generally played old Harry with the whole crowd. Finally we had to let her go, an' the last I saw of her she was on the range with a young foal alongside of her. If he took after his mother, then I guess some cow-punchers have had a little of their pride taken out of 'em." Incidents of this sort, of which Jones had an apparently limitless store, fired Jack's imagination and also helped to while away the time; so that, despite the limitations of space and the monotony of traveling, Jack was thoroughly enjoying himself.

Their companion had little to say, spending most of his time sleeping. He was not the type of "gentleman hobo" frequently met with, the man who, down on his luck, and not fitted for any useful trade or profession, slips into this nomad life, and, good philosopher as he is, gets more pleasure than discomfort out of it.

At noon of the second day the supply of food and water ran out, so they all fervently hoped that Montreal would soon be reached. As Jones said, their luck was in, for shortly before dark the freight train pulled into the goods sidings

at Montreal. They waited until it was dark, and then slipped quietly out of the box car, glad in the freedom to exercise their limbs again. They bid a hasty farewell to their companion and, walking at a rapid pace, they were soon clear of the depot. Jones knew Montreal, particularly the places where cheap meals and lodgings were to be had, and as they walked along, he confided his plans to Jack.

“The first thing we’ve got to do is to have a good sluice down at a Y. M. C. A. place I know of where you can get a good hot bath for a nickel; after that there’s a restaurant kept by a Chinaman where you can get all you want to eat for two-bits (twenty-five cents), and then we’ll go on to a place where you can get a comfortable bed for another two-bits. After which we’ll lay in a stock of grub and board another ‘hobo express’ for the West. I’ll spend to-morrow scouting around the goods depot to find the likeliest freight to suit our purpose.”

Jack was quite satisfied to leave everything to his companion’s greater experience, being confident that everything would go smooth. After they had had their bath, Jones apologized to Jack for his lack of funds.

“I’m real sorry that I’ve got to draw on

your funds," he remarked. "I could easily get a job here for a few days, but I guess you are as keen as I am to get moving again."

"Sure I am," replied Jack, "and you are quite welcome to the little money I have. But for you I don't know how on earth I should have managed. I don't suppose I should ever have got away from Halifax, and then most likely that brute of a captain would have found me and dragged me back aboard of the *Jersey* to treat me worse than ever."

"Well, and that's quite likely what would have happened," said Jones.

After the bath they went down to the Chinese restaurant and, after the rough fare on the *Jersey* and the still more undesirable food on the journey from Halifax, the meal was a feast to Jack of the most delightful description. The bed, too, was a good one, a very pleasant contrast to being jostled on the top of a bale of hay in a dark, stuffy box car.

The following day was a busy one, and the little money that was left was judiciously expended by Jones in purchasing the right kind of foodstuffs, not too bulky but satisfying and nourishing. Jones went out "scouting," as he said, leaving Jack to fill in time as best he

could. After an absence of about two hours he returned with a look of triumph on his face.

"It's all right," he announced boisterously and cheerily; "our luck's still in. I've got my eye on a nice cozy seat for two on a freight that is going through to Fort William. Think of it; all the way to Fort William, and she's pulling out at eleven o'clock to-night."

Shortly after nine o'clock Jones and Jack, each carrying a small bundle of food, might have been seen moving quickly and stealthily in the direction of a freight train already made up. There were quite a number of officials moving about, so they made for the first box car, pulled back the sliding door until they could squeeze in, and closed it quietly and slowly. Jones felt around, and gave vent to his disappointment as he touched only the hard, sharp edges of boxes.

"Afraid our luck has taken a turn, for there's nothing around here that feels like making a comfortable bed. Still, we'll just sit on one of these boxes until she starts, and then I can strike a light and see if there's anything to make a bed for you."

"Don't mind about me," said Jack. "I can rough it just as well as you can."

"Oh, I don't doubt that," replied Jones, "but you ain't used to this kind of thing the same as I am."

So they waited there patiently until the train started and then, when quite sure that it was well clear of the city, Jones struck a match. After peering about for a few minutes he made a joyful exclamation.

"Our luck's on the seesaw," he shouted, "for I can see some bales of cotton or something of the kind over in that corner. I'll strike another light, then you can climb up and make yourself comfortable, an' I'll follow you."

He struck another match while Jack climbed over the boxes and on to the bales. Then he carefully extinguished the match and climbed up alongside Jack, who reached down and gave him a helping hand.

"Well," remarked Jones after he had settled himself down, "not half bad, is it?"

"I should say not," replied Jack; "I'm sure I could roll off to sleep in two ticks."

"Look here," said Jones, suddenly becoming serious, "you an' me are becoming pretty good partners, even if I am six years older than you are, and I feel the same kind of feeling toward

you as I would if you were my own brother, for I've taken a fancy toward you an' know that you'll make good some day. You know, life's a pretty rough game to play if you are playing a lone hand and don't exactly know the value of the cards. To play it on your own without a friend handy to tell you when to hold your hand and when to show it, means that you have to wait so long before you dare risk a little gamble on it that the best part of your life is gone afore you are able to gather in the stakes. I don't know whether you get my meaning or not, but I intend to stay with you just to keep you from making mistakes and to help you to make good so that, for instance, when you want to travel you can do it in proper style and not have to sneak into a box car and dodge these fellows on the lookout for you. Now, if we are going to be partners, I don't want you to call me Jones as if I was a stranger, but to call me Joe, the first handle to my name—d'you understand, kid?"

"Sure, I understand, Joe," replied Jack; "but why don't you call me 'Jack' instead of 'kid'? You don't want a kid for a partner, do you?"

"I'm sorry, Jack," replied Joe, "but you

seemed kind of young and sort of needed looking after."

Jack thought this was a very happy arrangement, and was delighted to be assured of the constant help and companionship of Jones, who knew the ropes and was a tall, strong, good-hearted fellow. The next day they varied the monotony of their traveling by sliding the door back, and looking out on to the country they were passing through. The early part of the day it was through farm lands smilingly prosperous, with snug houses and orchards, but toward dark they had passed into rough, wildly picturesque country, with myriads of little lakes with fringes of gorgeous autumn foliage.

The following morning they passed around the edge of Lake Superior. In the late afternoon the freight stopped and Jones, anxious to replenish the small supply of water they had left, decided to risk getting out and filling a bottle from a small lake close to the railroad.

"It's nearly dark, Jack," he whispered, "and I don't think they'll see me," so he dropped out of the car on to the railroad track and darted toward the lake.

But he was spotted.

"Hi, there, you hobo!" shouted the con-

ductor, "beat it for all you're worth; there's no free rides on this railroad."

Jones paused, then turned round and shouted to Jack, "Come on, Jack, the game's up; he's seen me."

Jack jumped out of the car and followed Jones into the bush.

"I'm sorry," said Jones in tones of anger and despair; "it was a foolish thing to do, for here we are stranded in the bush an' miles from everywhere."

"It was only bad luck, Joe," replied Jack. The freight was now nearly out of sight.

"Let's sit down and think it over, and try to figure out the best thing to do. Can you smell anythin' burnin'?" he added excitedly.

"Yes, what is it?"

Jones stood up, and just then in the gathering darkness a flame shot up into the sky. Jones's face was pale and drawn when he turned toward Jack.

"They've set the bush on fire," he shouted; then, seizing Jack by the shoulder, "run, kid, run for your life!" he yelled.

CHAPTER III

A FOREST FIRE

AS so frequently happens, a spark from the engine had fallen into the thick, dry undergrowth; this had burst into a flame and had ignited the brittle shrubs, and these in turn had carried the fire to the tall trees. In the gathering gloom the sight of the flames leaping from tree to tree was grand and awesome, and Jones, looking back at this swiftly pursuing enemy, realized the deadly peril they were in.

"Faster, kid, faster," he urged; "if we're lucky we might get to a clearing before she catches us up."

The thickness of the undergrowth impeded their progress, and the thick columns of smoke that preceded the fire blinded and choked them. Jack struggled along, gasping and exhausted. The fire was gaining on them rapidly, and they were now being scorched by the great heat from the blazing, roaring mass of trees behind them. Jack, choked by the thick smoke and almost overcome by the intense heat, with his eyes

painful and swollen, now began to reel dizzily, and Jones put his arm around him to help him along.

"Come on, Jack, boy, keep it up; I think I see the reflection from a lake just ahead of us."

There was no reply, and the man felt Jack go limp in his arms—he had become unconscious. Scarcely pausing in his stride, he threw the lad on to his shoulder, and crashed heedlessly through the undergrowth, hands and face bleeding, and his clothes almost torn to ribbons.

The steady roar of the rapidly pursuing flames now deafened him; the heat scorched and maddened him, and the smoke blinded and choked him. It seemed as if a hundred fiends were attempting to drag him back, back into that furnace of flames. It was only his great strength and magnificent physique, together with a tremendous will power and a fierce determination to save the boy, that enabled him to resist the impulse to give up the fight. In a semi-conscious condition, sobbing with exhaustion from the tremendous effort he was making, he at last reached the shore of a fairly large lake and plunged at once into its cool waters. He was immediately revived, and his brain began to work in a normal manner again. He

dipped Jack's head into the water, and the effect was instantaneous. Jack opened his eyes and looked wonderingly into the other's face.

"That's better," said the sailor cheerily. "Can you swim? We are not safe yet, but I can see a little island about a couple of hundred yards away; let us make for that."

"Lead the way, Joe, and I'll follow you," replied Jack. They both were strong swimmers, and in a little while they dragged themselves up on to the small island. Although they were so far safe, their plight was still desperate. The great heat from the furnace of flames around them was almost unbearable, for they were literally in the center of a blazing mass of trees.

"Stick to it," said Jones encouragingly as Jack lay with his face buried in the earth; "she's at her worst right now."

It was a fascinating sight to watch, the flames leaping from tree to tree like fiends in a frolic. Fortunately, the trees fringing the lake were not large; they burned fiercely and quickly, and after two or three hours the heat became more bearable, so that they were both able to sit up and talk things over.

"Well, Jack, I'm afraid our luck is out with

a vengeance, though it was only by the mercy of Providence that we escaped from a certain and frightful death, for I don't mind tellin' you now that it was a pretty close call."

"I don't remember it all," said Jack; "the last remembrance I have of it was as though the flames were wrapping themselves around me and dragging me back, and it also seemed as if strong hands were at my throat choking me and as if red-hot pokers were gouging my eyes out. Then there was a blank and the next thing I remember I was in the lake. How did I get there, Joe?" But Joe was not answering questions then.

"I know now," continued Jack. "You must have carried me after I fainted." Then, huskily, "Joe, it seems to me I owe my life to you."

"Aw, shut up," replied Jones. "I got you into the scrape; but for my darned pig-headedness we should still have been aboard that freight."

"Yes, but you risked your life to save mine."

"Nothing of the sort. I knew that I could easily make the lake ahead of the fire."

"Well, I'm sorry I can't believe you, Joe, for you said only a few minutes ago that it was

a pretty close call; and look at your clothes, all torn to ribbons."

"Well, as for that, you have nothing to boast about yourself, Jack, boy, for you look as much like a hobo as anything I ever saw. Come on, gather a few of the dead leaves together and we'll make up a bed. With a nice free fire provided for us, we ought to sleep warm an' comfortable."

Jack was by now becoming used to strange and novel kinds of beds. He lay awake for a little while thinking of the miraculous escape he had had from a frightful death, and with his heart overflowing with gratitude toward his companion sleeping beside him. It was truly a wonderful sight that he saw around him: the dull glow from the now smoldering trees, the weird reflections in the water, and the distant roar from the fire which had swept past them to their great peril, and which was now greedily devouring acres of splendid, stately trees. Presently he fell asleep, and was awakened some hours later by the cheery voice of Jones.

"Come on, Jack, shake a leg; we can't afford to stay in this place, nice little island though it is. The larder's empty, so we must hit the trail as soon as possible, though I'm not at all

sure of bein' able to get far. The bush is thin here and soon burns out, but where it is heavy she sometimes burns for days an' weeks at a time. Up to now I've only seen a forest fire at a distance. It looked bad enough then, but last night's experience has that faded to a shadow. Say when you are ready to take the plunge and we'll be going."

In a few minutes they were standing on the shore of the lake, shaking the water off themselves. They were both in surprisingly good spirits considering the trying experiences they had passed through, and the difficulties of their present position. Jack had all the optimism of a boy of sixteen, which was encouraged by the unfailing cheerfulness of Jones, backed up by a resourcefulness and an experience of knocking about the world under all manner of conditions, both pleasant and otherwise. They had not traveled far when they were driven back by the heat and smoke from the smoldering, tall trees. Added to this was the great danger from falling trees and branches.

"It's no go, Jack," said Jones; "we've got to back up, for it would be suicide to attempt to get through. We'll get back to the lake, and give it another day to burn out."

So they beat a hasty retreat to the shore of the lake.

"Well, Jack," remarked Jones, "I don't know how you feel, but if I didn't have a kind of sneaking regard for you I think I'd turn cannibal."

Jack laughed. "I feel just about the same, Joe; but surely with so much water about there ought to be some fish."

"Well," ejaculated Jones, "just step over this way and kick me, will you? I guess this smoke has got into my thinking box. Sure, some of these little lakes are fairly alive with fish. I'll hunt around an' see if I can find a fairly stout branch that the fire hasn't nibbled at, and if we're lucky enough to dig up a few worms we might have a first-class breakfast yet."

Jones returned unsuccessful; but, not to be balked, he swam out to the little island and came back with one between his teeth. Fortunately they both had strong leather boot laces and, by the aid of these, they had soon rigged up a fishing line. It required a lot of patience digging with old pieces of charred branches before they dug up their first worm. When everything was ready Jones waded into the

lake and soon had a nice catch of small fish. There was no trouble about fixing up a fire, for there were charred, smoking branches lying around everywhere. All things considered, the day passed off very comfortably and successfully, and at night they stretched themselves out on the shore of the lake and slept soundly.

At daybreak the prospects of bursting out of their fiery prison looked considerably brighter, for the loud reports occasioned by falling trees were noticeably fewer, and the smoke less dense and troublesome than on the day previous.

"I think we'll make it all right this time, Jack," remarked Jones. "We'll get back to the railroad and then travel back past the place where the fire started, and then things will be smooth."

But it was by no means easy, for in places the fire was still burning furiously; but by persevering and carefully picking their way they eventually reached the railroad and in a few minutes were clear of the smoldering bush.

"I reckon we'll shake hands on the narrowest escape from being converted into a cinder that I've ever had," remarked Jones. "Fancy a man who has been passing as a sailor for five years being burned to death in a forest fire!

Sounds a bit rum—doesn't it?—but it nearly came true. But you do look a scarecrow, Jack, and no mistake, what with your blackened face an' your tattered joy rags. I guess we'll have to produce our credentials afore they'll allow us to enter the first village we come to."

It was nearly three hours before they sighted a village along the track, and their relief and thankfulness can easily be imagined.

"Hope they'll take pity on us, Joe," said Jack, "and if I look half the wreck I feel I'm pretty sure they will."

"Don't you worry about that," replied Jones; "we'll be all right here for a few days."

Their arrival in the small village, the center of an industrious farming community, occasioned a mild sensation. Even so far away they had felt something of the heat from the fire, and at night the steady, dull red glow in the sky had told its own story. More than one of the older inhabitants could tell a thrilling tale of experiences in a forest fire, of the dreadful devastation that it had wrought. The village was only clear of the edge of the forest, and already precautions had been taken in case the wind should change. Their sympathy with these two derelicts who had passed through such a

harrowing and perilous experience, and miraculously escaped death, soon took a practical form. The good-natured proprietor of the little hotel quickly took them under his care, and in a short while our two heroes were eating ravenously the substantial meal he set before them.

"Jack, boy," remarked Jones, "our luck's in again. There's no cause to complain of the hospitality of the people in this town. I've just had a talk with the proprietor, and he's offered us both a job for a few weeks if we care to stay. I'm goin' to look after the livery stable he runs here, and he said he could keep you busy helping around the place. Of course, the wages ain't very big, but I guess we had better stay here for a little while. With the winter coming on, we'd better make sure of a decent home and then get out West in the early spring, when things are busiest around a ranch. What d'you say, Jack?"

"Well, Joe, I'm what you call a greenhorn in this country, and I leave everything to you. For myself, I think I'd like to work around here for a little while."

"It's a go then, Jack, so I'll fix things up with the proprietor. Oh, the fellow that owns the store across the way has sent over to say

that if we care to step over he'll give us a new rig-out, so our luck's in for fair."

The owner of the general store was as good as his word, and in a little while Jack was sporting a new pair of blue overalls, a thick mack-inaw coat, and a slouch hat.

The bright willingness of Jack, and the cheery, robust manhood of Jones, soon gained for them a general popularity in the village. Jack often thought of the difference between this and his life on board the *Jersey*, and never once regretted having deserted at Halifax.

Since settling down in the little town he had written home a glowing account of his new surroundings and of his plans for going West with Jones to qualify as a cow-puncher. All his spare moments were spent around the stables, and Jones, with his expert knowledge of horses and the management of them, never tired of explaining things to him.

CHAPTER IV.

A TRAIN WRECK

JACK had his first experience of a Canadian winter, and despite the discomforts of the intense cold, he found it thoroughly enjoyable. Being a good skater, he soon entered into the popular pastime, and practiced assiduously at the favorite game of ice hockey, at which he promised to be extremely efficient and capable. Altogether, his stay in the little Ontario town was a very pleasant and profitable break in the journey West. He grew taller and stronger and more capable every day, and under the supervision of Jones he became a very efficient horseman, which promised well for him when the time came for him to take his place among those picturesque, devil-may-care riders of the plains.

Shortly after Christmas the two held a consultation as to their future plans.

"I guess, Jack," said Jones, "that we had better be makin' a move pretty soon. This is a nice little town, and the folk about here are powerful kind, but this life is too unexciting. If we

stayed here much longer we'd be growing beards and developing a rheumatiky limp. Now we've been here nearly four months, and I've got nearly a hundred dollars 'cached' away, and you say you've got fifty, so with a hundred an' fifty dollars in the exchequer we're in pretty good shape to hit the trail again for the West. What do you say, Jack?"

"Sure, I'm game, Joe; after all that you've told me about ranching and bronchos and cow-punchers I couldn't settle down here as a 'chore boy' for a hotel keeper for the rest of my life," replied Jack.

"That's the spirit, boy, that's the spirit," remarked Jones approvingly; "they say a rolling stone gathers no moss, which I don't deny, but it gets a rare polish on it; besides, it's not natural for a boy of your age to be content with any old thing. Never be afraid to quit a job if you see a better one ahead of you. The man that fastens on to the first and only job he ever had grows on to it like a fossil, and pretty soon he begins to look like one. There's nothing of the fossil about you, Jack; you are just the kind to make a name for yourself out West. In a couple of weeks we'll hit the trail again, and we'll travel in proper style—no stowing

away in a box car this time, to be chased into the bush after they've set the darned thing on fire, an' then having to sit in a lake with your head in the water tryin' to keep your eyelashes from bein' burned off. What do you say about it yourself?"

"I'm all for riding, Joe, where you can look out of the window and admire the scenery, instead of spying out through a crack in the doorway," replied Jack.

"You're right; we will pay for the right to do as you please, more or less, on our next train traveling."

And so it was decided that they should, as Jones said, hit the trail again. Two weeks after this conversation they took leave of the good-natured hotel proprietor and the many friends they had made during their short stay in the village. Two trains a day passed through the tiny "flag" station, one going east and one west, and these only stopped if they were "flagged." Jones and Jack bought their tickets for Winnipeg, which made a big hole in their fund. The train was duly "flagged," and pulled up for them to climb aboard. Fortunately, the small station was on the direct transcontinental route, and once aboard the train they had a

through trip to their destination, occupying a little over two days.

This was Jack's first real train ride in Canada, and the spacious car, filled with a cosmopolitan crowd of European immigrants, proved to be of great interest to him.

"A funny-looking crowd in here, Joe; what are they?" he asked after they had settled down.

"Oh, a bunch of dagos just arrived from Europe. Not a very clean or sweet-smelling crowd, are they? We have thousands of these in the States, an' funny people they are; live mostly on garlic, I think, judging from the smell of 'em," replied Jones.

"They look pretty cold, don't they?" remarked Jack.

"They do, but if you were to see them out West you'd be surprised to see the way they try to keep themselves warm. They sew the kids up in their clothes when the winter starts and don't undo the stitches until the spring comes—a real dirty crowd," concluded Jones in disgust.

"Look here, Joe," called out Jack, "d'you recognize this place?"

"I sure do; that's just about the spot where

we hit into the bush after leaving the freight, and there's the lake that saved our lives."

The devastating effects of the fire were plainly evident. What had been a magnificent forest was now a desolate region of burned stumps. More than once during the day Jack, whose eyes were scarcely ever from the window, saw similar wide stretches of desolation. Occasionally he and Jones took a stroll through the cars to stretch their legs, and when the train came to a standstill, as it did at intervals, they got out and walked about, and more than once narrowly escaping being left behind. Toward dusk they were standing on the platform at the end of their car when Jones remarked:

"Smell anything burning, Jack?"

"Yes, I do," replied Jack.

"Well, I guess we ought to know the smell by now," continued Jones. He then leaned over and looked out. In the fast gathering gloom he saw a space ahead which he concluded was a ravine or river which they would soon cross, when, just as he was about to turn to Jack, he saw the engine plunge into space! There was a deafening, grinding crash, and he was thrown headfirst down the embankment. Jack, who had been standing immediately

behind, pitched over on top of him. They looked up just in time to see the last of the ill-fated train plunge down the bank. Then followed a series of deafening crashes and the noise of escaping steam. They scrambled to their feet and ran along the track toward the point where the train had disappeared. They paused on the edge of a steep bank rising almost abruptly for a hundred feet from the frozen river below. A cloud of escaping steam hid from their view the wreckage of the train.

“Run back, Jack,” said Jones, “and give the alarm to the first man you see; tell him to phone for doctors to come at once. I’ll scramble down somehow and see if I can help anybody—that is, if there’s anybody left alive.”

Jack needed no urging; he ran the next two miles faster than ever he had run in his life before, and fell up against the door of the office of a little flag station they had passed only a few minutes before. It was some time before he could give a coherent message, but when he did the man on duty rushed to the telegraphic board, and his fingers rapped out news of the greatest and most tragic disaster in the whole

history of Canadian railways.* This done he turned to Jack.

“Sit down, kid, and take a breath, for you deserve it. In an hour we’ll have an ambulance train here, and you can go back on that.”

But Jack could not be persuaded to stay; he could picture Jones alone among that scene of wreckage and death, and he wanted to get back to help him.

Jones, as soon as Jack had gone, quickly found a way down to the river, and plunged into the work of rescue. The scene was beyond description. The huge engine had plunged almost through the ice, while a mass of indistinguishable wreckage represented the rest of the train. Alone in the darkness, with the agonized cries of the injured ringing in his ears, Jones worked like a Trojan. In the midst of it, he was joined by Jack, and through their efforts more than one unfortunate passenger was extricated from a position of great pain and peril.

Some time later bands of skilled workers and doctors came on the scene, and by daylight all

*In the winter of 1910-11 a train disaster similar to the one described above actually happened.

that could be done for the injured had been done. None had worked harder or more untiringly than Jones and Jack, and their work came in for general praise and commendation.

Jones turned to Jack. "Jack, boy, we've got to shake hands again. It's a miracle that we are not lying there among that mangled iron an' woodwork." And they shook hands solemnly and silently.

CHAPTER V

THE GATES OF THE WEST

JACK and Jones turned their attention to the causes leading up to this terrible disaster. The burned ends of what had been a bridge jutted out from the river banks, and these told the plain and tragic story. It could only have happened in an isolated spot, for the bridge had somehow caught alight, probably through a hot cinder from a passing engine, and had burned itself out without any one being any the wiser. The driver of the ill-fated train, unaware of the yawning chasm ahead, had driven the train up to the brink and, too late, had applied his brakes. It was this that had thrown Jones and Jack off the platform and so had saved their lives. Their prompt action, and the splendid services they had rendered to the unfortunate victims, was suitably recognized by the railway company; they were richer by one hundred dollars each and a first-class ticket to

their destination—Winnipeg—together with free meals provided *en route* in the dining car, and a sleeping berth. As Jones lounged in the dining car sipping his coffee and puffing at an excellent cigar, he remarked to Jack, sitting opposite:

“Say, Jack, but don’t this beat box car traveling together with ship’s biscuits, bully beef, and cold water?”

“Rather!” replied Jack. “I’ve never even dreamed of such luxury and comfort. As you say, our luck’s in for fair.”

Forty-eight hours later they arrived at the busy terminus at Winnipeg, after what had been to Jack one of the most exciting experiences in his life. He said so to Jones, but Jones affected to treat it with tolerant good humor as though the experience was, to him, an almost everyday occurrence, which greatly amused Jack, who was wide enough awake to see the exaggerated attempts his friend made to appear at his ease. However, they were both very happy when, with their modest packages, they emerged from the terminus.

“Well, Jack,” remarked Jones, “seeing that we’re rather flush, I think we ought to do ourselves well for one night; we’ll put up at a swell

hotel, have a swell dinner and a swell bed, an' then to-morrow we'll think 'bout work again."

Jack cordially agreed to the proposition, and followed his companion into the most palatial hotel in Winnipeg. Their rough attire did not exactly harmonize with their surroundings, but it did not excite notice or comment, for many of the wealthiest ranchers of the West patronized the same hotel, and they never affected any other attire than that of their ordinary everyday life.

As events turned out this proved to be rather a shrewd move on the part of Jones, for, after booking rooms and handing their small packages to the uniformed porter, they adjourned to the lounge and, according to the easy-going custom of the West, entered into conversation with their nearest neighbors.

Jones was equal to every occasion, and being a sociable, good-natured young giant, he was soon engaged in conversation with a tall, clean-shaven, and wholesome-looking man of about fifty. Though Jones did not then know it, he was one of the best and most widely known ranchers of the West. He was a Scotch-Canadian by the name of McIntosh, who had spent his boyhood days in the then "wild and woolly

West," his father having been a factor at one of the Hudson Bay trading stations. He was a typically shrewd and long-headed Scotsman, and as good a judge of men as he was of horses. He was pleased with Jones, and regarded Jack approvingly. His conversation with the former had come round to the most widely discussed topic of the moment—the recent terrible railway disaster, and Jones, with his highly descriptive phraseology, had given him a graphic description of it.

"So you were the two boys that the papers are writing so much stuff about?" commented McIntosh in the slow, characteristic drawl of the born Westerner.

"I suppose so," replied Jones, "though to tell the truth Jack and myself have never read them; we were too glad to come out of it with a whole skin, and too thankful for the first-class ticket, together with free feeds, to want to find out anything more about that train wreck. We were bound for the West, and had barely enough money to see us safely and comfortably to the end of our journey."

He then proceeded to give McIntosh a history of their adventure from the time Jack arrived on board the *Jersey*. The rancher was highly

interested, and nodded approvingly at different periods in Jones's detailed narrative.

"Well," he said in his slow drawl when Jones had finished, "I guess that you two boys are sure made of the right stuff, and just the kind to make good out here. Now I can always find room for a couple of good men. At present I have a small herd of cattle, round about twelve thousand head, and about two thousand head of horses. My ranch is south of the foothills in Alberta, so if you boys care to look me up when the frost breaks I'll be only too pleased to give you both a job and will pay you good wages, provided you both make good. The West is no place for a slouch; it wants hustlers, boys not afraid to work. What d'you say, you boys, are you on?"

"Rather!" exclaimed Jack before even the quick-spoken Jones had time to reply, his bright eyes alight with excitement.

"I guess we are, Mr. McIntosh," said Jones. "This friend of mine is plumb crazy to get on a ranch, and speaking more for him than myself, I don't think you'll regret givin' us the chance to make good. For myself, I was brought up on a ranch, just the same, you might say, as some babies are brought up on the bottle. My

first memory is that of a cow pony, and now, after being a sailor for more'n five years, I'm just as keen about it as Jack here."

As they all stood up, preparatory to leaving, the rancher gave Jones further particulars of the location of his ranch.

"Now, boys," he said cheerily, "I'm leaving on the train for Calgary in a few minutes, and I'll be disappointed if you don't turn up as promised."

"No need to worry 'bout that, Mr. McIntosh," replied Jones; "we'll hang about Winnipeg for the next two weeks, by which time the frost will have broken; then we'll hit the trail straight for the Q. Z. ranch."

As the rancher shook hands with Jack he remarked approvingly, "Boy, I like your looks; you are the build for a cow-puncher—wiry, clean-limbed, with a bright eye and a stubborn mouth. I wish you luck, and if I can ever be of any help to you don't be afraid to ask."

After he had gone Jack's excitement and exultation knew no bounds, and even the good-natured Jones had to remonstrate and throw in a word of warning that a cow-puncher's life was not all honey. "There's one good thing about it though, Jack: Mr. McIntosh won't use

sea boots on you, as the big bully aboard the *Jersey* did. We're in luck to meet a man like that, for I've known ranchers that 'u'd run the skipper a pretty close race for the prize of being the biggest bully on earth. Now, we'll have that swell dinner we promised ourselves, after which to bed. To-morrow we'll pull out of this hotel and find a cheaper place to live. It's been a good investment, though. Never spend your money recklessly, Jack, but to be close-fisted don't necessarily imply that wealth will follow as a natural consequence. Money spent wisely and with a purpose will never ruin you, for more often than not it more than comes back to you. The man that's afraid to open his fist in case he loses what he's got, can't expect that people are goin' to pry it open to slip another coin in."

After Jones had rid himself of this accumulated wisdom, which Jack had readily absorbed, they went into the dining room. For a rough sailor and cow-puncher, Jones conducted himself admirably until the finger bowls were brought round, when, instead of dipping his fingers in daintily, he promptly raised his to his lips and drained it to the last drop!

Jack, though unused to dining in first-class

hotels, was careful to watch those at neighboring tables, and pointed out to Jones his serious breach of etiquette.

Jones's admirably sustained *sang-froid* hastily abandoned him and, not waiting for any further explanations, he bolted out of the dining room, to the serious discomfiture of the waiters, whom he unceremoniously brushed aside. Jack followed discreetly in the rear, only in time to see Jones ignoring the elevator and disappearing up the broad staircase. When Jack arrived in the bedroom he found Jones, looking very hot and confused, seated on one of the beds. Immediately Jack appeared he called out:

"Come on, kid, pack up; this high life doesn't agree with me."

"Don't be silly, Joe; we've paid for the room, so why shouldn't we sleep here?"

"Honest, Jack, I simply couldn't do it. I'll have nightmare for sure if I stay in here overnight."

Then he began to rave. "Now, Jack, can you tell me why they bring you water at a meal table if they don't intend you to drink it? It's only natural to suppose that's what it's for unless they bring a towel an' a piece of soap."

"I don't see why you should grumble," replied Jack, his eyes twinkling with merriment. "You wanted a swell dinner, and now that you've had it you don't seem to be satisfied."

"You're right, Jack. I wanted a swell dinner, but I didn't expect to have a bath along with it at the same time. Pack up, for it's out we go on the hustle."

Jack patted the bed he intended to occupy.

"Not with this for a couch, Joe," he replied; "you can go if you like and call around in the morning for me."

"Oh, well, Jack, have it your own way, but I'm locking that door in case one of those chaps in uniform takes a notion to try any of his tricks on us."

The next morning Jones was up bright and early, doing up his packages preparatory to leaving.

"Come on, Jack, up you get," he shouted; but Jack was too comfortable to pay much heed, though at last he was compelled to do so.

"What's the hurry, Joe?" he inquired sleepily.

"Oh, no particular hurry, Jack, except that I'm mighty anxious to get out into the open air."

"We've got to wait for breakfast, and that won't be for another hour," grumbled Jack as he turned over in bed.

"Wait for breakfast here!" exclaimed Jones; "not on your life. If they expect me to bathe after dinner, most likely they'll expect me to go for a swim in the fishpond after breakfast! Oh, no, I'm not eating breakfast in this place."

In spite of all Jack's protestations, Jones remained adamant, so Jack was compelled to get up and dress.

Outside of the hotel the air was particularly keen, the thermometer registering 43 degrees below zero.

"Well, Jack," remarked Jones as they walked along, "I'm makin' for the inside of the first Chink restaurant that I see."

They did not go far before Jones saw what he was looking for, and over a substantial breakfast of ham, eggs, and hot cakes, they discussed their future plans.

"It's no good making a move for two weeks, Jack, for the frost is unlikely to break before then, so we'd better find some cheap lodgings an' just hang about."

Jack was agreeable, so, breakfast over, they set out on their quest for lodgings. Acting on

the information given them by a policeman on point duty, they reached a part of the town where they got comfortable lodgings at a reasonable rate. As they were both too active to enjoy idleness, even only for a few days, they quickly secured temporary work at a large livery stable, and as soon as the winter showed signs of breaking up they bought their tickets for Calgary.

It was after leaving Winnipeg that Jack got his first glimpse of the vast rolling prairie, and the suggestion of limitless space it conveyed brought back to him vivid memories of his brief experiences as a sailor. Instantly he knew that he would love the outdoor, adventurous life ahead, with the days spent in the saddle, as Jones had told him, riding over these seemingly limitless plains. His blood quickened at the thought of it, and throughout the day his eyes remained glued to the window. The small typically Western villages they passed through absorbed his interest, and he directed an endless stream of questions at Jones, who good-naturedly answered them all and encouraged Jack in his riotous enthusiasm.

Early the following morning and before it was daylight they arrived in Calgary. Jones

made inquiries of the time the first train left for the little town in the foothills which was their ultimate destination. They then had breakfast, and caught their train, which took them through the ranching country. Occasional glimpses were obtained of riders galloping over the prairies, and the thousands of head of stock which were grazing made it plain that this was the home of the ranchers.

They descended from the train at the small station, and were now in a typical ranching town. In front of each of the rambling wooden stores was to be seen the ever familiar "hitching pole," to which were fastened wiry and occasionally wicked-looking bronchos. Tied to the stock saddle was the lariat or lasso, the stock in trade of every cow-puncher.

"Well, Jack, you must understand that a man never walks in a cow country, and we've got to hire a rig at the livery stable and have them drive us out."

They walked over to the livery stable, around which lounged several men clad in the typical outfit of the Western cow-puncher—Stetson hat, loosely tied, gaudily colored neckerchief, and woolly "chapporals," better known as "chaps." These latter are, briefly, lambskin

trousers which protect the legs of the rider. They buckle up at the top in the same way as a belt. Jones asked for the proprietor.

"Any chance of a rig to drive us out to Mr. McIntosh's ranch?" he asked.

"Yes," was the prompt reply, "Q. Z. ranch, eh, about four miles away?"

"That's the place." As they waited for the rig being got ready, Jack looked over the men lounging around. They made a picturesque group, and he admired their wiry, athletic frames and noticed the peculiar walk which a man develops after constant riding in the saddle, a walk just as typical of the cow-puncher as the "roll" of the sailor. Indeed, it is very similar. Not only does the life lived in the saddle give a peculiarity to his walk, but it gives a distinct and distinguishing curve to his legs. Their constant exposure to the varying kinds of weather gives a leathery appearance to the skin, more or less in keeping with their picturesque outfit. Jack took note of all these things, and then and there determined that he would in time become as daring, as skillful, and of as striking appearance as any of them. As the horses were being hitched up to the rig one

of the several men lounging about came up to Jones.

"Going out to the Q. Z.?" he asked.

"Right away," replied Jones; "have an invitation from Mr. McIntosh which he extended to us to call on him."

"Well, I'm going out that way, an' if you wouldn't mind waiting while I get my hoss I'll ride out with you."

"Glad to have your company," replied Jones.

In a few minutes their new acquaintance returned leading his pony, and as Jones and Jack climbed into the rig he leaped lightly into the saddle, quite unconcerned at the vicious antics of his half-wild broncho.

As he "loped" along by the side of the rig he carried on a spasmodic conversation with Jones.

"Been in this country before?" he inquired.

"Nope," replied Jones, slipping into the familiar phraseology and dialect of the range; "been in Texas, though."

"Know Mr. McIntosh?" he asked.

"Yes; met him in Winnipeg. He said if we came down here he'd give us both a job. D'ye know him?"

"Yes, work for him."

The conversation, carried on with long intervals, was kept up until the buildings of the Q. Z. ranch came in view. It was easy to see by the extent of them and of the "corrals" that this was what was commonly known as "a large-sized ranch." The "corrals," which at once took Jack's eye and excited his interest, were nothing more nor less than railed-in inclosures of stout poles. Two large flattened posts were driven into the ground, leaving a space between them sufficiently wide to receive the ends of the poles, laid horizontally. They were then carefully built up to a height of usually about seven feet, but, as the end of the pole on the left of the posts rested on the end of the one on the right, there was a space between each pole equal to its thickness. This enabled any one outside the corral to see quite easily what was happening inside. The great utility of a corral fence was that any section could be taken down to permit of an opening being made, and quickly built up again, without in any way impairing the general structure. The purpose of the corrals will become increasingly evident as we follow Jack's career as a cow-puncher.

As they approached the house their companion, without even a nod for a farewell,

dashed off in the direction of the outbuildings. The spasmodic nature of the conversation and this abrupt farewell made Jack wonder why the rider should have expressed a desire to ride to the ranch with them at all. But he was soon to learn that the companionship of the range was one of silence; men rode side by side for hours without exchanging a word, but nevertheless appreciating to the full the enjoyment of companionship. The man who talked continuously was looked upon with suspicion; the more a man talked the less capable he was considered to be.

The home of the rancher was an attractive-looking, long, low bungalow with a wide, spacious veranda. It was built on a knoll and commanded an extensive view of the rolling ranch lands. The door opened and the rancher stood on the threshold. He quickly recognized the newcomers.

"Welcome, boys, welcome; I'm real pleased you've kept your word and looked me up."

He came to the rig and shook them heartily by the hand. The warmth of his welcome went straight to Jack's heart: it was the first "home touch" he had experienced since he left his home in Jersey.

"Just leave your luggage outside while I take

you in to introduce you to my family. They all know about you and will be real glad to meet you."

Once inside the bungalow there followed introductions to the rancher's family. In addition to his wife, there was a nephew about a year older than Jack, and a daughter about a year younger. The lad, Chris, was, as Jack was soon to learn, surly and ill-tempered, ever ready for a quarrel, and inordinately proud of his undeniable skill as a cow-puncher. The girl, good looking, and with the jaunty, confident bearing of the Western "cowgirl," was frankly pleased to see them. The rancher invited them to partake of the meal then being prepared, after which he himself took them over to the men's quarters and introduced them to the foreman.

"These are the two boys I told you about, Bill," he said; "just fix 'em up with a bunk and blankets for to-night. I'll see you about them in the morning."

After he had gone and they had settled down, Jack took stock of his surroundings. The men were housed in two large buildings, one for sleeping and one for eating. He was allotted a comfortable bunk alongside Jones and was given a plentiful supply of blankets.

"Well, Jack," said Jones as they turned in

for the night, "we've been on our way a long time, and have had all kinds of 'upsets,' but we've arrived, and I think you'll be happier here than you would have been on board the *Jersey*."

"I'm sure of that, Joe. From to-morrow I'm going to throw my whole heart and soul into the work."

"That's the spirit, Jack, boy; keep it up and you're bound to make good."

CHAPTER VI

ON THE RANCH

THE following morning Mr. McIntosh, whose interest in them proved to be thoroughly genuine, came down to the men's quarters to see that the new arrivals were properly fixed up, as he said. He selected a horse for Jones, who, thoroughly experienced rider that he was, was quite ready to take on his new duties. This done, he turned to his nephew who had accompanied him.

"Chris," he said, "you take this boy in hand for a week or two and get him thoroughly used to riding, so that he can take his place among the rest of the boys."

He then turned to Jack.

"Now, it's up to you, Young, to make good. You've been quite frank about what you can't do, so I want to give you a fair chance, and I haven't any doubts about the result. Chris here will help you to get acquainted with a pony, so that you can soon take your place on the range."

He then walked away and left Jack in the care of Chris.

"What d'you want to be around a ranch for if you can't ride?" growled the latter in surly tones.

"Oh, I can ride a bit," replied Jack cheerfully. "I only want a bit more experience."

"Well, if it's experience you want you'll jolly soon get it. Come along this way and we'll see what you can do."

Now this conversation had been overheard by many of the boys in the "bunk house," as the men's quarters were called.

The rancher's nephew was no favorite, and they knew that Jack was in for a rough time as he walked away with him toward the corral. At the same time, the prospect of a bit of fun at the expense of this young greenhorn was not to be resisted, and even though they knew that they would have to laugh with Chris, they were quite prepared to overlook this disagreeable feature of what promised to be a really interesting time. Unpopular though Chris was, there were few of the riders who could give a more skillful display than he of horsemanship on a bucking broncho. His favorite pony was a smart-looking black gelding recently broke into

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the saddle and only mastered after a difficult duel. Accustomed as they were to these half-wild equine creatures, with that inherited love of freedom which violently resisted any attempt to restrain it, many of the boys, with proud reputations for skill and daring, avoided contact with the pony which Chris was now leading out, and which was being provided as a test of Jack's horsemanship.

"Oh, say," remarked one lanky youth, "give the kid a chance unless you want to have 'im killed an' done with."

Chris turned round on him fiercely.

"You mind your own business, Slim; if he wants to learn to ride, let him learn in one lesson or else get off the ranch. We don't want half-baked cow-punchers among the Q. Z. crowd. If he breaks his neck, that's his funeral, not mine."

This attitude on the part of the rancher's nephew was one of pure selfishness. His reputation as a horseman stood very high, indeed for his age he was unequaled. He was extremely sensitive to rivalry, and in Jack he saw a potential rival.

Why not, he reasoned, knock him out in the first round and get rid of him? If he could go

back to his uncle and say that Jack was absolutely no good as a horseman and never would be any good, then Jack would be given the humble and menial duties of "chore boy!" At the outset of his newly chosen profession Jack was confronted with the severest and, comparatively speaking, the most difficult test he would ever be called upon to face.

He made no comment on this obviously unfair method of testing his capabilities as a rider. He had been quite frank with Mr. McIntosh; he had not pretended to be a rider, and the rancher, appreciating his frankness, had given instructions that he should be taught; but his nephew, to whom had been delegated the task of teaching, had decided otherwise. It was not to be a lesson in horsemanship, but a test. Jack's mouth tightened and a grim fighting expression settled upon his face.

"I'll tackle the horse first," he said to himself, "after which I'll have a go at the teacher."

He had too much spirit to offer a protest, and too much pride ever to make a complaint to Mr. McIntosh. Probably the most interested onlooker was Jones, whose first impulse had been to put a stop to this unfair treatment, but seeing the expression on Jack's face, he said

to himself, "No, the kid is going to make a fight of it, an' it will do him good."

The rolling eye of the broncho as he was led into the corral was a plain warning that he was prepared to make trouble for whoever proposed to take a tilt with him.

"Here you are," said Chris, handing the bridle lines to Jack, "climb up if you can, and let us see what you're made of."

Jack, with a determined "do-or-die" expression on his face, took hold of the lines and made a motion as if he were going to climb into the saddle. But the broncho, seeing and anticipating this, swerved round slightly toward him, reared, and then struck at him violently with his front feet. It was only Jack's agility that saved him from a nasty blow; but no sooner had he averted this frontal attack than the broncho swerved from him, dropped his head, and let out with his hind feet. This time Jack did not get quite clear and received a nasty kick on the right leg above the knee. In spite of the momentary pain (for fortunately it had been a glancing blow), Jack's determination to get on the broncho's back had not weakened, and his plucky attitude won for him many new friends among the onlookers.

The broncho next reared up high on his haunches, and for a moment it looked as though he would come down on Jack's head. He stepped lightly to one side, and as the broncho came down heavily on his front feet, he slipped his left foot into the stirrup, with his back to the pony's head, grasped the horn of the stock saddle with his left hand, and the back part of the saddle with his right (as he had been taught to do by Jones), and vaulted lightly into the saddle.

For a greenhorn this was, as one of the on-lookers said, "a nifty piece of work," and there was a spontaneous shout of approbation.

"That kid's no slouch," shouted Jones enthusiastically, delighted that Jack had won the first round of the bout with the broncho. There was an ugly scowl on the face of Chris; he had not anticipated even this success for Jack. However, the latter's troubles had only begun, for scarcely had he touched the saddle than he was bounced up out of it. He dropped back with a thud that almost shook his teeth loose, and only maintained his seat by wildly grabbing at the horn of the saddle.

"Don't pull leather, Jack," shouted Jones; "let him throw you first." There was a con-

temptuous sneer on the face of Chris, and Jack momentarily suffered a loss of the respect and approval that he had so recently won from the onlookers.

"Pulling leather" was a method of retaining one's seat that went against all the sporting instincts of the cow-punchers. To pull leather was to seize hold of the horn of the stock saddle, the part projecting in the front and around which the lariat rope was twisted after an animal had been roped. This was considered to be taking an unfair advantage of a horse, and a practiced rider who could not stay in the saddle by skillfully distributing his balance and by maintaining a steady grip with his knees would rather be thrown than pull leather. Jack's action was prompted by ignorance of the etiquette of "bronchobusting" and by a perfectly natural instinct to seize hold of the first thing handy to save himself. He heard Jones's warning, saw the sneer on Chris's face, and knew that he had committed some serious breach of the rules of the game. Though not the thing to do, it undeniably helped him to get his balance and to give him time to get a good grip with his knees, as he remembered Jones had always advised him to do; for it was in Jack's

favor that he was cool and collected. He was thinking rapidly, even though he was undergoing a difficult and unenviable experience that was always to live in his memory.

The broncho next attempted to throw Jack by violently bucking. Up he would go into the air, arch his back, and drop his head, and then come down on all fours with a tremendous concussion. Lights danced in front of Jack's eyes, his teeth were almost shaken loose, but in spite of it all he somehow managed to hang on to his seat, to the accompaniment of a noisy demonstration of admiration from the onlookers. True, there was nothing very elegant about the way he kept in the saddle; it lacked that easy assurance of the skillful rider; but at any rate he was putting up a good fight.

This was not all in keeping with the expectations of Chris. He had confidently expected that Jack would never even get into the saddle, much less remain there. He was annoyed with his pony, and furious to think that there was a prospect that the laugh would be against him. He stepped quickly over to the pony, raised his "quirt," and brought it across the pony's flanks with a resounding thud. The result was the final undoing of Jack, for the pony raised and shot

out his hind legs with tremendous vigor, and precipitated the lad over his head in a twinkling. Fortunately Jack was only shaken, and he laughed as Jones, who had rushed over to him, helped him to his feet.

"A lucky fall that, Joe, and it came before I realized what had happened," he remarked, as he dusted his clothes.

"That wasn't a white man's trick, Jack, and I'm goin' to make him pay for it."

"Don't bother, Joe, just leave him to me. I'd decided before I got into the saddle that I'd settle with him after I was through with the pony."

He left Jones and walked over to Chris, who had caught the pony and was on the point of leading him out of the corral.

"Just a minute," he said with a quiet note of determination in his voice; "I may not know all the rules of the game in riding bronchos, but I think I know how to play the game between man and man, which, I am sorry to say, is more than you do."

"What d'you mean?" replied Chris, turning on him fiercely.

"I only mean that you acted like the low-down cad you are by first of all giving me a

pony to ride that only an expert cow-puncher could handle, and then deliberately maddening the pony until he threw me."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"Oh, nothing much, except settle with you right now."

"Settle with me! Why, I'll give you the worst hiding you ever had in your life if you talk to me like that."

"That's just what I want you to try to do," replied Jack quietly.

"Here, Slim," called out Chris, "just take my pony while I teach this greenhorn some manners."

The boys now drew in closer; this promised to be one of the best morning's sport they had had for some time. Slim approached and took charge of the pony, while Chris turned round to Jack.

"I won't take off my coat," he said, "for I scarcely think that will be necessary."

"Neither will I," replied Jack, buttoning up his coat, "or else you'll be making that an excuse of how it came about that I gave you a good hiding."

The physical advantage was decidedly with the rancher's nephew, for he was taller and

heavier than Jack, but Jack was nimble and particularly clever with his feet. A fight was nothing new to him; in his school days his ability had been unquestioned, and had gained for him a respect among his schoolfellows.

If Chris was far ahead of Jack as a rider, Jack was just as much his superior as a fighter. The fight did not last long. Chris made a rush at Jack as though to finish him off with one blow, but Jack promptly shot out a beautifully timed left to the jaw, which brought his antagonist to an abrupt pause, and the applause that followed it showed very clearly where the "boys' " sympathy lay.

"That was a real beauty," shouted Slim enthusiastically, and in his eagerness to see the fight he let the pony wander off at his own sweet will. Jack was quick to see his advantage as his antagonist stood dazed and undecided in front of him; he feinted with the left, and then brought the right across to the point of his opponent's jaw, putting the whole weight of his body behind it. Chris dropped like a log; and lay there until he was picked up and carried into the bunk house.

Jones rushed over to Jack. "You're a real terror to fight, kid, and you did that beauti-

fully. You can bet your life he won't be so disrespectful to you in the future. A conceited young kid like him needed it."

"Yes, he did," replied Jack, "but I'm sorry it happened all the same. I suppose Mr. McIntosh will be turning us both loose, and I would be sorry for that after the kind way he has treated us."

"Don't you worry about that. If he does we can soon pick up another job, but I don't think he will. He's not so powerful struck on his nephew, leastways so the boys say, an' more than likely he will say it served him right."

For a youngster, and particularly a greenhorn, Jack was quickly taken into the fellowship of those who ride the plains. The plucky way in which he tackled the half-tamed broncho, and his prompt and skillful settling with Chris for the mean and contemptible trick he had played, won for him the immediate friendship and good will of the boys of the Q. Z. ranch. They judged a man by his pluck and daring, and also by his ability to use his fists—which last was rapidly taking the place in their estimation of the speed by which he could draw a revolver.

When Mr. McIntosh heard of the fight he

completely exonerated Jack. Chris did not meet with any sympathy from him. "You had no earthly right to put him up on that pony. Had I known that you were going to do that I should have taken him in hand myself, and as for the contemptible trick you played on him—well, all I can say is that I'm glad he gave you what you deserved. He hasn't lived on a pony's back all his life as you have, and I intended that he should be given a fair chance to make good, which I am sure he will. He seems pretty capable of taking care of himself as far as you are concerned, and all I can say is that I'll leave you to him if you play him up in any way."

To Jack he said, "I'm sorry to hear there has been trouble between you and Chris, and I want you to forget it. I don't blame you in any way for what happened. From all accounts Chris did not play the game with you, and he deserved the hiding you gave him. As long as you do your work in a satisfactory way there'll be no kick coming from me. As you seem to have made a pretty good show with that tricky broncho I've told Bill to give you a pony and to make you one of the regular riders. Of course you have a lot to learn yet, but the boys have taken a fancy to you and you'll find them

willing to teach you all the tricks. As soon as you are ready to take your place in the round-up I'll pay you the same wage as the other boys are getting."

Jack's feelings after this will be easily imagined. He had been afraid that the trouble with Chris would have led to his dismissal, in which case, of course, Jones would have gone with him. As Jones had said, this would not by any means have been a calamity, as there was always a job waiting for a rider; but Jack had appreciated to the full the kindness and the hospitality of the owner of the Q. Z. ranch, and particularly remembered the kind way he had spoken to him in the hotel at Winnipeg, and to have left the ranch more or less in disgrace would have been a bitter blow to him.

Chris did not take his beating in a very sporting spirit. It was the severest blow that his dignity had ever suffered, and the fact that details of the fight had become the common knowledge of the riders on the range increased his feelings of enmity toward Jack. It is true that he refrained from showing his feelings in an open way, for he knew that his uncle never said a thing that he did not mean, and he was wise enough not to ignore a very emphatic warning.

But he found ways and means of making himself unpleasant. On one occasion, for instance, Jack's pony, a frisky but by no means vicious animal, went into a perfect frenzy of madness until he had thrown his rider, and Slim, who was on the spot at the time and knew the tricks that could be played on a novice, immediately removed the saddle and found a prickly cactus under the saddle cloth. It had been slipped under while Jack, leaving his horse tied to a corral fence, had gone to give a helping hand with a troublesome young steer that was being branded. Of course Jack could do nothing except keep his eyes open so that the same kind of thing shouldn't happen again.

Annoying and distressing as this petty persecution was, it was more than compensated for by the consistent kindness of the rancher, and his wife and daughter. Mrs. McIntosh's motherly heart had been touched by the story of Jack's hardships aboard the *Jersey* and the subsequent difficulties he had experienced before arriving at the Q. Z. ranch. Her daughter Joan was frankly friendly toward him, and among his happiest experiences were some mad, exhilarating gallops with her over the prairies. She was as accomplished as any rider on the

Q. Z. ranch, and her skill with the rope was simply amazing. It was mainly from her that Jack learned to use it himself with a dexterity that soon landed him among the first flight of "ropers."

Jack never spent an idle moment from daylight to dark, and when not out riding or busy with the work around the ranch, he was practicing assiduously at those arts in which it was the aim of every cow-puncher to excel. The lasso became a thing of life in his hands; it unwound itself like a snake, moving unerringly toward its object and encircling it with amazing rapidity and certainty.

Jack had soon been able to equip himself with all the trappings of the cowboy, including the ever-present automatic. It was one of his chief aims to become an expert shot. A fair proportion of his wages was spent in replenishing his supply of ammunition, as never a day passed but what he fired off two or three dozen rounds. Naturally, with such constant practice, he rapidly became expert, and his deadly accuracy in shooting from his horse was unequaled. A favorite trick of his was to ride after the coyote or prairie wolf, and to fire at it from the saddle, usually with telling effect. This was all to the

benefit of the ranch, for the coyote is a very destructive animal, especially among young calves, and a bounty was paid for every coyote killed. They were usually very brazen, and sometimes allowed Jack to ride comparatively close up to them, only slinking away in a surly manner, and not infrequently showing their teeth as they were retreating. Out would flash Jack's automatic, and in a twinkling the coyote would be rolling over in its death agony.

It was Jack's success in dealing with the coyotes that gained for him the nickname "Coyote Jack," and in spite of his youth he quickly became a celebrity on the range—which was a matter of no little pride to Jones.

The cow-punchers usually rode and worked in pairs while on the range, and Jack and Jones were inseparable. In spite of his rapidly acquired accomplishments, Jack still regarded himself as the merest novice, and continued to look up to his friend as his ideal, for of all the riders of the Q. Z. ranch there was none more efficient and capable than Jones.

It was while working together on the range that the ex-sailor figured once again as the preserver of Jack's life. It must be understood that in every large herd of cattle grazing on the

prairies there were a few specially picked bulls who grazed with the herd. They were fairly good-natured, unless in any way seriously molested, when they would round on any one or anything that annoyed them—not infrequently another bull—and a battle royal would result.

In this instance the molester happened to be Jack, and bulls, when aroused, are never inclined to show any preferential treatment, even toward human beings. Jack and Jones had been detailed off to run into the corral a certain number of cattle which were eventually to be shipped off to the stock market in Calgary. They rode over to where the herd were grazing and picked out the ones most suitable—a difficult matter for any but the most accomplished riders, for there is nothing more stubborn and stupid in the world than a young steer.

They had picked out the required number and were returning with them, when a strong young three-year-old bull decided to make one of the crowd. Jack galloped after him and tried to cut him out, but he would not be denied, and eventually got back in among them again.

“Leave him alone, Jack,” called out Jones;

“we’ll cut him out when we run ’em into the corral.”

When they finally arrived at the corral, the bull refused to leave his family. Whether it was that he had an inkling of their ultimate fate and considered that they needed his protection, or that he hated returning alone, it is difficult to say, but there was no half-heartedness about his determination to get into the corral with them. Both Jack and Jones repeatedly cut him out, but he just as often returned.

When most of the cattle had been driven into the corral Jack called out: “You run the rest of them in, Joe, while I chase him away; I guess he won’t come back when he sees that they are all inside.”

He then turned his attention to the bull and endeavored to drive him off, which was not an easy thing to do, for he swerved and rushed back at the first opportunity. Balked in his attempts to get back among the bunch at the entrance, he presently espied some of them inside the corral through the fence, and without a second’s hesitation he dashed madly into it. There is no doubt that he must have seen stars, and they must have been all bright red

ones, for when he turned toward Jack there was the light of madness in his eyes. Instead of submitting to being chased, he took on the rôle of chaser. He turned around, deliberately sized up Jack and his pony, lowered his head, and went at them at a furious gallop. Jack, who had been unprepared for this, was almost caught napping; he just managed to avoid him by swinging his pony round on his haunches. The bull stopped, turned, and came back at him in another wild charge, and so quick was he in executing this return move that Jack, though he saw him coming, was unable to get the pony out of his way. Head down, he charged and caught the pony on its flanks, one of his horns tearing open the flesh and the other penetrating Jack's right leg.

Both pony and rider went down and lay absolutely at the mercy of the now thoroughly enraged bull. Fortunately Jones had turned just in time to see the crash, and digging his heels into his own pony's sides, he galloped over from the corral. Before the bull could renew his attack upon Jack, Jones was alongside. He threw his feet out of the stirrups, and at the right moment dropped from the saddle on to the neck of the bull, seized his horns in both hands,

and threw him over on to his back. It was a very skillful piece of "bull-dogging," and the bull, when he scrambled to his feet, was too dazed and stunned to resume the fight. Jones helped Jack on to his pony and took him over to the bunk house.

After his leg was bandaged and he lay in his bunk, Jack called Jones over to him.

"Joe," he said, holding out his hand, "that's the second time you've come to my rescue. Only such a cow-puncher as you are, and as I hope to be, could have got me out of that scrape."

"Don't you be a fool, Jack," replied Jones. "You've got me plumb beat for cow-punching. You only need to learn 'bull-doggin''—an' I'll give you a few lessons some day—and you'll have me beat to a frazzle."

CHAPTER VII

THE CATTLE RUSTLERS

IT was several weeks before Jack fully recovered from the injury inflicted by the bull, and during the time of his convalescence he spent many pleasant hours in the home of the rancher.

Mr. McIntosh had taken more than an ordinary interest in Jack's welfare, and had been immensely pleased at the remarkable progress he had made. As a mark of his appreciation he had presented the lad with a new sixty-five dollar stock saddle. It was a beautiful saddle, and in giving it to Jack he said: "Young, I want you to accept this as a present from me. I've been watching you since you came to the Q. Z., and I have never seen a boy throw his heart and soul into the work as you have done. You are already almost equal to the best cow-puncher I have, and that after only a little over six months' experience. I guess you'll make a big reputation for yourself, and when the Stampedes come round I can see you clearing up

the prizes and bringing them back with you to the Q. Z. ranch."

Jack's delight at this splendid gift, accompanied by such kind words of encouragement, can readily be imagined, and it was not in the least diminished by the scowls of Chris, who happened to be present and overheard these remarks. The relationship between the two was one of strict neutrality, neither of them making any approach toward the establishment of friendly intercourse. But this did not in any way interfere with the pleasure Jack used to feel when visiting Mr. McIntosh's home. Mrs. McIntosh showed a motherly solicitude in Jack's injury, and her daughter Joan vied with her in her attentions. As Jones said to him afterward, "Jack, boy, you've got to be careful, for they're spoiling you at the ranch house. You'll soon be turning your back on the likes of us boys at the bunk house."

"Don't you worry, Joe, old boy," replied Jack; "there's nothing in this wide world would drag me away from you."

But they were glorious times for Jack, lying in the hammock on the broad veranda, with Joan reading to him, and interrupting the reading with tales of the Northwest—of the days

when the red man held unlimited sway. She gave him thrilling accounts of fights against great odds between the early white settlers and the Indians. Many of the tales were of happenings that had actually occurred at the Hudson Bay post on which her father had lived, when the settlers were compelled to seek safety behind the barricades in the days of the Riel Rebellion.

It was a fascinating story of how the great, fertile plains of the West had passed into possession of the British Empire through the bravery and perseverance of that hardy race of pioneers. It fired Jack's imagination, and often as he lay with eyes closed he seemed to live through those stirring times of the past. He could scarcely believe that those inoffensive, silent Indians he daily ran across had in them the same blood as "the noble red man," the unconquered warrior of the American continent.

He was to see, though, in days to come that the fighting instinct was still strong, that the traditions of the past were not a dead letter to them. It was one day toward the end of Jack's convalescence that Mr. McIntosh came to him with a worried look on his face.

"Three more steers gone to-day, Young," he said; "that makes twelve in two weeks. I've put the mounted police on, but they're baffled. I thought the days of cattle rustling had gone. There must be a gang working this country, for Wheeler on the Three-Bar ranch has had ten stolen in less than a week."

"Cattle rustling" was, as Jack knew, the Westerner's equivalent for cattle thieving. Every rancher branded his stock with a mark registered at a certain Government office. Branding was rather a cruel but necessary thing. A red-hot iron was pressed into the hide of the horses and cattle, imprinting on it the brand of the owner. All horses and cattle branded with a Q. Z. belonged to the Q. Z. ranch, and similarly with other ranches.

Cattle rustling demanded both daring and skill on the part of those who practiced it. The thieves usually worked in gangs and in a systematic way, and young steers, recently branded, were their favorite prey. They usually picked them out one at a time, caught them and threw them, made up a fire on the spot, branded them afresh, and drove them off. They then collected the stolen cattle into a bunch,

drove them across the prairie, and sold them at the first opportunity.

In the lawless days of the early pioneers the fate of the cattle rustler, as with the horse thief, was a swift and speedy one; he was taken to the nearest tree and left there to dangle. Even in the days of law and order the punishment is deservedly severe.

The day following Mr. McIntosh's announcement, Jack discussed the matter with Joan.

"I would love nothing better than to catch them red-handed before the 'mounties' got them! Can't you think of some way of doing it, Joan?" he asked.

"Well," replied Joan, "I think the best thing to do would be to pick out some place where they are likely to work, and keep watch there. They'll never do their work on the open prairie."

"That's a good idea, Joan; if we could only once spot them it would be easy."

"What about you and I going over toward the river? I should think the coolies¹ the very place where they are likely to work."

"I'm on, Joan," replied Jack enthusiastically; "that's a great idea of yours, and we'll

¹Steep, grass-grown gullies leading to a river.

follow it up. We'll keep quiet about it, but each day we'll walk over toward the coolies. It would be foolish to ride, for they would spot our horses and get wise; but we'll take our lariat ropes with us. I'm fairly good at throwing now, and you are heaps better than I am. If, as you say, they usually work in pairs, we may catch them both."

Jack was full of enthusiasm and certain of success the first day he hobbled over, with Joan's aid, to the coolies. But many days were to come and go before his hopes were to be realized. The lookout they kept was not tedious, for they were glorious autumn days, but each day as they went back to the ranch Jack's hopes had sunk a little lower.

The cattle rustlers were growing bolder, and in spite of the sharp lookout kept for them they succeeded in evading detection, and continued to carry on their thieving with increasing success. Mr. McIntosh had now lost over thirty head of young cattle, and the losses of other ranches in the district had been correspondingly high; so Mr. McIntosh called a conference at his house, to which all the ranchers affected were invited.

The result of the discussion was the offer of

a reward of five hundred dollars to any one delivering up to the ranchers named the bodies, dead or alive, of any one or more of the gang of cattle rustlers. This move smacked of the bad old days, and gave the cow-punchers license to use their shooting irons.

"Yes, sirree," Slim was overheard saying, "if any of them cattle-rustlin' guys comes within range of my ol' six-shooter there'll be a wide streak of daylight showin' through them in rather less than no time."

The promise of a reward gave an added zest to Jack's naturally keen desire to lay the cattle rustlers by the heels.

"We must buck up, Joan," he said, "for my leg will be as fit as ever in a day or two and then I'll be back on the range, and this little game of ours will be off. Besides, all the boys are dead keen to get hold of them now, and if the rustlers get wise to this reward they'll soon beat it in a hurry."

"Oh, don't you worry, Jack," replied Joan, pausing to pull tighter a wide leather belt to which was attached an automatic, "I have an idea that we'll soon be walking up to dad and claiming that five hundred dollars."

For a few days following the publication of

the reward it really looked as if the rustlers had gone or else had temporarily suspended operations. The latter proved to be the case for, after lying low for a couple of days, reports of more thieving came in.

There was probably no one keener to catch the thieves than Chris, for, since his fight with Jack, his reputation had been more or less in a state of eclipse. He rode the range from daylight to dark, indefatigable in his efforts to catch the thieves.

It was on the fourth day after the offer of the reward, and the last day of Jack's convalescence, that Joan and he lay looking down into one of the few coolies in which they had not previously kept watch. It was already dusk and would soon be dark.

"Come on, Joan," Jack was saying, "I'm afraid we're fairly out of luck; this was our last chance, and it seems to have gone west along with the others."

He was about to scramble to his feet when he suddenly exclaimed:

"Hello! D'you see that, Joan—over in the next coolie?"

A thin curl of smoke, barely distinguishable, had caught his attention.

"Come on," he urged, trailing his lariat rope behind him, "I believe we're on the trail at last."

Joan needed no urging, for she was every bit as keen as Jack. They hurried quietly and stealthily toward the coolie from which the smoke was coming. As they approached the edge they got down on their hands and knees and then peered cautiously down into the coolie. What Jack saw there made his heart bound with excitement, for nearly a hundred feet below them there were two men, half-breed Indians, busily engaged in rebranding eight or ten young cattle.

"The cattle rustlers for certain!" whispered Jack. They had built up a little fire at the bottom of the coolie with bits of dry wood that had been thrown up earlier in the year when the river was in flood.

As Jack and Joan lay watching them they threw a rope around a young steer, gave it a twist, and threw the steer over on to his back. They quickly tied his legs, dragged him over toward the fire, stuck the red-hot branding iron on him, rubbed a little grease over the hide where it had been seared, and then turned him loose. Considering themselves apparently

secure, and emboldened by their success, they failed to take even the most elementary precautions, not even bothering to look up and around them. Had they done so they could not have failed to have seen the boy and girl stealing carefully down toward them until they had the men well within range of their lariat ropes.

"A little luck," whispered Jack, "and we'll have them clinched. You throw first, at the one farthest away; I'll have my automatic handy in case there's any shooting to do. As soon as you've roped your man, I'll have a go at mine."

It was just at that moment that the man nearest to them looked up carelessly, and, in the gathering darkness, distinguished two forms about sixty feet above him, maintaining a precarious foothold on the side of the coolie and poised ready for a throw.

Quick as he was to see and to draw, Jack was even quicker, and as the half-breed whipped out his revolver, Jack fired and smashed the weapon out of his hand.

Joan, with admirable coolness and with her aim undisturbed by the shooting, sent her lasso hissing toward the other half-breed. With deadly accuracy it hung for a brief second poised over his head, then dropped over his

shoulders. With lightning-like swiftness the girl tightened the rope and threw the half-breed before he had realized all that was happening.

She then ran lightly down the side of the coolie, and before the half-breed had gathered his scattered wits, he was looking into the barrel of an automatic. Joan slackened the rope which had pinioned the man's arms to his sides, and then curtly ordered him to hand over his weapon.

In the meantime Jack was having an exciting time, for the other half-breed, having had the revolver smashed out of his hand by the shot from the lad's automatic, had immediately turned and fled toward two ponies, which were grazing some distance away. Jack immediately rushed after him. The half-breed made a flying leap into the saddle of one pony and tore off at a mad gallop. Jack made for the other, sprang on its back, with the lariat rope dangling in one hand, and followed in swift pursuit.

It was a thrilling chase, with Jack gaining on the half-breed all the time. He refrained from shooting, as he wished to take his prisoner alive. He had been lucky enough to get the speediest pony, or he would have been com-

pelled to fire, and with his constant practice at shooting at coyotes from the saddle, he would no doubt have brought down his man. As it was, he rapidly closed in on the half-breed, swung the lasso round his head a few times, and then threw it forward, catching the half-breed round the body and dragging him to the ground. Jack slipped the rope round the horn of the saddle and drew it taut. He then jumped to the ground and dashed over toward the man, who was now vainly struggling to disentangle himself; but the more he tugged at the rope the tighter it became. Jack covered him with his automatic, helped him to his feet, and then walked him back toward the pony.

"A pretty good try to get away, old sport," he remarked jocularly.

"You smart boy, eh, heap good shot," grunted the half-breed.

"Well, I guess I was a little too smart for you, and a girl has got your pal buffaloed."

Just then a shot rang out, and Jack's heart gave a great bound.

"Come on, you," he said, turning fiercely to the half-breed, "I'm going to truss you up and leave you here."

With the slack rope he deftly and securely

pinioned the half-breed until he could scarcely move as much as an eyelash. He left him lying on the ground, sprang into the saddle at one bound, and dashed back to the place where he had left Joan.

It was now almost dark, and as he approached the place he heard a moan of pain.

"Joan! Joan!" he called out wildly, a great fear clutching at his heart.

"Hello! That you, Jack?" came back the cheery response. "Did you get the other rustler?"

"Yes," replied Jack, his voice expressing the relief he felt, "got him trussed up as nicely as a prize Christmas turkey; but what's happened here?"

"Oh, you heard the shot I fired, I suppose?" asked Joan calmly. "This man started playing up; suppose he thought a girl would never dare pull the trigger. I warned him once, the second time I let him have one in the foot, and it seems to have hurt."

"Joan," said Jack admiringly, "you're a regular brick. Serves the brute right if you have hurt him; he ought to have behaved himself when he was being decently treated. Rather funny, though; I got mine in the hand

and you got yours in the foot! Now that I know you are all right, I'll slip back on the pony for my prisoner, and we'll be getting back to the ranch with them."

He returned to the spot where he had left the other half-breed bound, untied his legs, helped him to his feet, and gave him the order to go ahead while he himself followed behind on the pony.

"Here we are, Joan," he called out cheerily. "Guess we're going to have some fun getting out of here, though, for I'm lost. We can't climb up the sides of the coolie."

"That's easy," replied Joan; "you don't suppose I've lived here all my life without knowing my way about. I'll act as guide if you'll look after the prisoners."

They then helped Joan's prisoner into the saddle. With true Indian stoicism the two men accepted their fate more or less silently. Jack finally freed his prisoner and gave him the bridle lines.

"Now, no monkey tricks," he said, "or else I'll plug you clean through the head; d'you understand?"

The half-breed nodded his head, signifying that he understood.

"Lead on," called out Jack; and, guided by Joan, with Jack bringing up the rear and covering the prisoners with his revolver, the little procession moved forward in the darkness. Joan soon led them to a path that brought them out of the coolies on to the prairie. The lights of the ranch twinkled in the distance, a good two miles away. As they approached the buildings, they saw some of the boys moving around attending to the stock kept on the ranch.

Jack thought he would attract their attention, so, pointing his automatic into the air, he almost emptied the magazine. The bunk house quickly emptied as the boys came tumbling out. Jack recognized the tall form of Jones hurrying toward them.

"Hello, Joe," he called out, "we've got two nice-looking cattle rustlers here all ready for killing."

"Well, sirree," ejaculated Jones, "if that kid hasn't got us all beat to a frazzle." They were soon surrounded by the Q. Z. boys.

"And Miss Joan, too!" said Jones, as he walked up.

"Yes, Joe, and had it not been for Miss Joan, these chaps would still have been running around loose."

"This way with them, Jack," called out Bill the foreman, and the little procession, now surrounded by a curious, congratulatory escort, followed Bill over to the bunk house; though when they arrived there Joan was missing, for she had taken the opportunity to slip off to the ranch house.

The half-breeds, surly, defiant, and silent in spite of their pain, were taken into the bunk house. They neither denied nor admitted any of the charges made against them. Mr. McIntosh, who had received a brief account from Joan of her adventure, hurried over to view and question the prisoners. He made an exclamation as soon as he saw them.

"Why, that's Pete the half-breed!" he said, pointing to the man with the shattered foot, the elder, by many years, of the two prisoners. "I never thought you'd have the nerve to come back into this country after the narrow escape you had from being dangled over twenty-five years ago."

The man he pointed to was a notorious Indian half-breed, a regular "bad man" type, with a romantic career. His white father had sent him East in his boyhood days to a well-known university, but drink, which quickly

inflamed the Indian blood in him, had been his downfall. He returned in disgrace, but not before he had imbibed some of the culture of civilization. The savage in him, however, quickly came to the surface, and he became one of the most lawless and reckless desperadoes the West had ever known. He gathered about him a gang, mostly Indians and half-breeds, which began a reign of terror, until the ranchers finally banded themselves together and hunted them down. Pete was caught red-handed at the very game he had lately been engaged upon—cattle rustling. He was hurried over to the nearest tree, and would have met with a speedy death but for the intervention of Mr. McIntosh, who had known his father, a highly respected factor at one of the Hudson Bay posts. His horse was given back to him, and he was taken over the border into the States and warned, on peril of being instantly shot on sight, never to return into Alberta again. From that day no one had seen or heard of Pete.

“Come, Pete,” said Mr. McIntosh sternly, “where are the other thieves you’ve had working with you?”

“You can find them for yourself,” retorted Pete angrily.

"Very well; bring a rope, boys; we can't afford to waste time on him."

There was an unrelenting look in Mr. McIntosh's eye as the rope was slipped over Pete's neck that alarmed the half-breed. He decided that things had gone far enough, and gave the required information.

"There are four more in the gang," he said, "all of them boys that can use their shooting irons to good purpose. You might find them near the shack at the bend of Gopher Creek—that is, provided you hurry, for we intended pulling out of this country to-night."

"Good enough!" said Mr. McIntosh. "Leave two men here, Bill," he called to the foreman. "The rest of you boys saddle up; we'll rope in the whole crowd yet."

There was a wild scramble for the ponies, and a few minutes later over thirty odd riders, Jack among them, were thundering across the prairies with Mr. McIntosh at their head.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ROUND-UP

THE shack they were heading for was nearly four miles away, and was an ideal place for the purpose for which it had been chosen, for it could only be approached from one direction. As was afterward discovered, one man had been posted there as sentry both day and night. Across the creek and between it and the river there was a piece of grassland where the cattle rustlers had driven the stolen cattle. The sentry, expecting the return of Pete and his companion, was keeping a keen lookout. The noise of the approaching riders was the first warning that something was wrong. He gave the alarm, and was soon joined by the other three. The thunder of the hoofs of the approaching horses quickly became more distinct, and soon both horses and riders came into view. The watchers ran back to the bottom of the defile, down which the horsemen must come to reach the shack. As the leading riders appeared they

emptied their revolvers. Mr. McIntosh was seen to lurch in the saddle, and would assuredly have fallen and have been trampled underfoot, had not Jones, who, with Jack, was riding alongside him, caught and held him. There was no pause; on thundered the riders down through the defile. Realizing how impossible it would be for them to put up an effective resistance, the cattle rustlers ran back to the shack and opened fire as the riders came down upon them.

Jones lifted Mr. McIntosh bodily from his horse and laid him across the saddle in front of him. At the first chance he wheeled away from the shack in order to render first aid.

Instead of charging at the shack, the riders, with Bill, the foreman, and Jack at their head, broke into single file and galloped round it, discharging their revolvers into it. The firing from the shack soon ceased, and one man came running out with his hands above his head. Bill, with Jack at his side, rode up to the building, dismounted, and went inside. As they entered they stumbled over the form of one man, killed, while the two others lay groaning where they had fallen, close to the window. They lit the lantern hanging in the center of the shack, the

walls of which were riddled with bullets. The only man to escape had saved himself by lying on the floor. One of the two wounded men lived only a few minutes, the other was given first aid and made comfortable until a rig could be brought from the ranch to convey him there for further treatment. Mr. McIntosh had had a very narrow escape, the bullet grazing the side of his head. He had been temporarily stunned, but quickly recovered, and insisted on riding back to the ranch with the boys. A rider was dispatched into town for a doctor, and after he had attended to the rancher, Jack was sent for.

"Well, Young," exclaimed Mr. McIntosh, reaching out his hand as Jack walked in, "we have to thank you and Joan for rounding up the cattle rustlers. I suppose you didn't think when you two went down into the coolie after them that you were tackling one of the most desperate and murderous villains on the American continent. It's lucky for you that you got there first."

"I didn't tackle him, Mr. McIntosh," interrupted Jack; "Joan handled him, roped him as neat as you'd like it, and then shot him in the foot when he started his monkey tricks."

The rancher's face lit up with pride. "Come here, Joan," he called out, and as she came near he caught her hand and drew her to him. "Girlie, your old dad's mighty proud of you, but I tremble to think what might have happened to you. If anything had, that young rascal there"—indicating Jack—"would have had to pay for it."

"Oh, but you mustn't blame Jack, dad; I urged him on to do it, in fact we were co-conspirators. We've been on the lookout for weeks, and this was to have been our last day, as Jack was returning to work to-morrow; and you should just have seen the way Jack shot the six-shooter out of the hand of the other brute," continued Joan enthusiastically.

"Come on, Young, let us hear the story," said the rancher.

But here the doctor intervened. "Not to-night, McIntosh," he said, "you must not have any more excitement; keep quiet for a day or two. There's no danger now, but we must be careful."

"Oh, well, just as you say, doc; but I'll have to write out a check for five hundred dollars to-morrow for these two young scamps. You'd better take another day off, Young," he con-

tinued, as Jack prepared to leave; "I reckon you've had a busy day to-day."

When Jack returned to the bunk house he was the center of an eager group of questioners.

"Well, sirree," remarked Slim, "if I don't feel like a two-year-ol' baby! Five hundred dollars for the arskin,—an' before I can reach out me hand to take it, I'll be shot if a young tenderfoot don't beat me to it! Now, ain't that enough to make a feller want to eat grass for the rest of his life?"

Jones turned on him fiercely. "Meanin', Slim, that the kid hasn't earned the money?"

"Meanin' nothin' of the sort, you ol' sea-goin' cow-puncher, but meanin' that the kid has made me feel that I ain't growed up yet to be a proper man."

Jones was mollified by this answer, and took Jack away into a corner where he could get all the details of his adventure from him.

"Well, Jack," he said when the latter had finished his story, "I aint' a bit sure whether or not I don't feel the same as Slim does. You are one of the smartest kids I ever saw, and I ain't sorry now that I helped you to get away from the *Jersey*. I saw you were made of the real genuine stuff, an' up to the present you've

neither surprised nor disappointed me. Keep it up, Jack, boy, an' some day you'll make good all right. I ain't been in th' picture at all since we came here," he concluded, smiling good-naturedly at Jack.

"Oh, yes, you have, Joe; what about to-night when Mr. McIntosh was hit?—but for you he'd have fallen off the saddle and been trampled underfoot. Then what about the time that bull had me at his mercy? Oh, no, Joe, you can't say you haven't been in the picture," concluded Jack.

"Mere details, Jack, mere details," replied Jones, blushing and embarrassed at hearing these things recounted.

The next day Mr. McIntosh, now very much better, sent for Jack and insisted on a detailed account of the events leading up to the capture of the cattle rustlers. When Jack had finished he said, "Well, Young, you've certainly earned that five hundred dollars, for Joan won't hear of any of it going to her."

"Oh, but it must, Mr. McIntosh," interrupted Jack; "she must take at least half of it."

"Now, don't you worry about her share of it, my boy," continued Mr. McIntosh, "you can leave all of that to me. I could only wish that

you were as well provided for, and I agree with her that the five hundred dollars should be paid to you. You've got your future ahead of you, and some day I hope to see you the owner of your own ranch. Now here's the check already made out, and with it my wishes for the best of luck."

Jack was a proud, happy boy when he left the ranch house with the check in his pocket, and the future was full of bright promise. His heart was set upon becoming a rancher, and this was the first step toward it. Then he be-thought him of Jones. Good old Joe! He would share the check with him; he owed so much to him, and it would be one way of repaying it. He sought out Jones and put before him the proposal that he should take half of the five hundred dollars. Jones did not reply for a few seconds; when he did Jack regretted that he had mentioned the matter.

"Jack, if you only measured up to somewhere around my size I'd try to thrash th' life out of you. I don't doubt but what you mean well, but you forget all 'bout this profit-sharing scheme once an' for all or else I'll forget that you an' me are pals." So Jack had to give up all idea of including Jones in his good

fortune, and his credit balance at the bank went up by five hundred dollars.

Pete, the half-breed, together with his two co-thieves, were tried at the assizes. The sentences were justly severe, Pete being sent to prison for fifteen years and the other two for ten years each. All of the missing cattle were recovered with the exception of two which had been killed by the rustlers for their own consumption. In addition to the five hundred dollars, Jack received three further checks for fifty dollars each from ranchers who had had their missing cattle returned to them.

Upon receipt of these, Jack immediately sought out Jones.

"Here, Joe," he called out, "tell me what I'm to do with these things."

Jones looked at them. "Now, look here, Jack, you an' me are goin' to fall out for sure if you bring any more of them there financial problems to me to solve. You ought to know what to do with them; just tuck them away along with that other check you had."

"Not me, Joe," replied Jack. "I wasn't the only one that had a hand in catching the cattle rustlers; what about you and the boys that went over to Gopher Creek?"

“Well, an’ *what* about us?”

“Oh, nothing much, excepting that I want you all to think of some way of spending this money, for even if we have to fall out over it, Joe, that’s where the money is going.”

So it was decided that the boys should go into town one night, when the one hundred and fifty dollars would be spent on their entertainment.

“Look here, Jack,” said Jones as they were saddling up on the night arranged, “you won’t find this party in any way resemblin’ a Sunday-school picnic. There’s no holding these boys when they let themselves loose, an’ I wouldn’t be prepared to undertake that it won’t finish up in a funeral party with any one of us actin’ the part of the guest of honor. You stay near me, Jack, and we’ll try to keep the party in order.”

The ride into town resembled nothing more nor less than a wild, sustained cavalry charge, which culminated in a simultaneous discharge of revolvers and automatics as soon as the town was reached.

“Come on, boys,” shouted Slim above the noise and hubbub, “let’s paint the ol’ town red.”

“Steady on there, Slim,” shouted Jones, “this is going to be a respectable party.”

"Meaning," shouted back Slim, "that it's goin' to be a hymn-singin' musical evenin'?"

"No, but meanin' that unless you behave yourself you'll be tied to your horse with free permission to return to the ranch in his own time."

With Slim somewhat subdued, the rest of the boys proceeded on more orderly lines. In extending invitations to the boys for the party, Jack had included Chris, but had met with an abrupt and surly refusal. He had taken no pains to conceal his disappointment at not having had a hand in catching the cattle rustlers, and it was a bitter pill for him to swallow that Jack had succeeded in doing it.

When the boys adjourned to the refreshment bar of the only hotel in the town, imagine Jack's surprise in finding Chris already there! It was common knowledge among the boys that Chris spent more of his time and money there than was good for a boy of his age, and he was already inflamed with liquor when the party went in.

Things went along merrily for some time. To add to the entertainment a shooting competition was started, playing cards being stuck up at one end of the room as targets, the one who

drew and fired quickest and getting most hits on the card being declared the winner. Jack's skill at this form of amusement was considerable, and Jones was not a whit behind him, so the result of the shooting was a tie between them. It was decided to shoot off the tie, each one being timed and shooting separately. Bill, the foreman, was acting as timekeeper, and Jack was to shoot first.

"Get ready!" called out Bill. Jack's hand rested on his automatic ready to draw. "Time!" called out Bill. A shot rang out, but not from Jack's automatic, and the room was plunged in darkness. A pandemonium broke loose, but only for a few seconds, for the proprietor, always prepared for such contingencies, rushed in with candles.

"Who fired that shot?" called out Bill angrily.

"I did," said Jones.

"You!" replied Bill; then, sarcastically, " 'fraid the kid was goin' to beat you?"

"Perhaps," returned Jones curtly.

"Oh, well, get on with the fun, boys," called out Bill, "the shooting's off."

Jones took Jack over into a corner. "D'you

notice anybody missin', Jack?" he asked, Jack looked round.

"Yes, Chris," he replied.

"Well, then, you'll guess why I plugged the gas mantle; that boy was just aimin' to put you out for the long count. I didn't want to call attention to it, so thought I'd best put out the lights. But keep your eye on him, Jack, he means to get you some day."

The party broke up about midnight, and as they rode out of the town they emptied their revolvers into the air, and then galloped wildly back to the ranch. Every one voted it a good evening, and Jack became even more popular because of his sporting refusal to accept the one hundred and fifty dollars as a personal gift.

"Yes, sirree," Slim loudly remarked as the boys were turning into their bunks, "that boy's a real genuine cow-puncher; none o' yer milk-and-water-daren't-spend-a-nickel fellows, but a proper man." All of which was very pleasing to Jack. To be one of the crowd of these dare-devil riders was what he had set his heart upon, and now he had succeeded.

The following days were busy ones for every one on the ranch, for they were preparing for

the autumn round-up. In the spring and summer, horses and cattle were allowed to wander at their own sweet will, and many of them wandered away miles from the ranch. In the autumn they were all rounded up and brought back to the ranch so as to be within a convenient distance should the severity of the winter weather prevent them from getting sufficient nourishment from the prairie grass. As long as the snow was soft and not too deep, they usually "rustled" for themselves, but when it froze hard and they were unable to paw their way through it, then it was necessary for the rancher to run them into corrals and other convenient places, and see that they got sufficient food. In extremely severe weather the ranchers, unless precautions had been taken, lost heavily, thousands of cattle dying from exposure and under-feeding. All the riders, with the exception of one or two left behind for the necessary duties on the ranch, went on the round-up, and as they were usually away for several weeks, a cook kitchen went along with them.

One fine autumn morning, with a cloudless sky and the air just a trifle nippy, the boys rode out from the ranch. Bill, the foreman, detailed

the riders off in pairs so that the country should be thoroughly searched for all cattle bearing the Q. Z. brand. The rendezvous at night was stated to which they would return, driving ahead of them all the cattle that could be found. At night, riders were detailed to act as guard, so that none of the cattle which had been rounded up should stray off again. Occasionally the cook kitchen would remain in one spot for several days, to permit of a thorough search being made.

Needless to say, Jack and Jones were paired off, and, side by side, they rode across the prairies day after day from daylight to dark. Those days were among the happiest that Jack ever spent. Together he and his companion would ride over to a bunch of cattle, then go in among them, cutting out from the bunch any that had the Q. Z. brand on them. They would then run them clear of their old friends in the direction of another bunch. They were then left some distance away, while Jack and Jones rode into the new bunch and sorted out the Q. Z. cattle, and returned with them to those that had already been collected. In this way a nice little bunch would be collected with which to return to the rendezvous at night.

It was pleasant but tiring work, for it meant hours being spent in the saddle each day, and it frequently involved hard riding, as some of the wanderers refused to be parted from their friends of many months. At night Jack, with his saddle for a pillow, rolled into his blanket; and often before falling asleep he lay for hours looking into the sky with its myriads of scintillating stars. Many happy evenings were spent around the wood fire after supper. Slim could knock a few decent tunes out of his violin, and the boys lustily sang the choruses. Jack and Jones had to take their turn as cattle guard at night, and a busy time it was too, for, though the majority of the cattle were quiet enough, some were more restless, doubtless remembering the friends they had recently been separated from, and they would attempt to escape from the crowd of strangers and steal off in the darkness. It was for these that Jack was on the lookout and many tussels he had with them. Some of them used to escape, and at daybreak they could be seen hurrying off back to their old haunts.

The round-up was fast coming to a close; several hundred cattle had been gathered in

and the party were retracing their steps back to the ranch.

It was at the close of a long, tiring day, and the boys had almost all returned to the camp. Jack and Jones had dismounted and were leading their ponies over to the picket lines, when there was an uneasy movement among the grazing herd. There was a tossing sea of heads all lifted up and sniffing.

"What's on now, Joe?" asked Jack. "Look at the cattle—every one of them sniffing."

"Was noticin' the same thing myself, Jack," replied Jones, "an' if I'm not plum crazy on smellin' smoke since that forest fire way down East, I should be mighty suspicious about a smell of burning."

"Same here, Joe; but look over there. Unless I've gone mad and am seeing things, that's not only smoke but fire!"

"Quick, Jack, quick! Into the saddle you get," shouted Jones, seizing Jack's arm excitedly. This was only the work of a few seconds for Jack, and not any too soon, for surging toward them at a rapidly increasing pace was the herd of several hundred cattle, heads tossing and a wild look of fear in their eyes. On they swept toward the little camp, moved by

that strongest of all animal instincts—the instinct of self-preservation, and pursued by the demon of fire which ran along the prairie like a thing of life, helped in its pursuit by a strong breeze. For the prairie was on fire, and the prairie grass, already withered and dry by the summer heat, was a willing servant of the scorching demon.

“This way, Jack,” called out Jones. “We mustn’t be caught in this stampede,” and together they made a dash for safety. The flying cattle presented a wild and fearsome spectacle. Maddened and terrified by the pursuing flames, they thundered across the prairie regardless of all obstacles. It would have been utterly futile and an act of insanity to attempt to stop them. The boys rushed for their ponies and got clear as best they could, away out of the path of the maddened herd. Jack turned to see what was happening in the camp, when to his horror he saw that Chris and the cook, unable to reach their horses, were in imminent danger of being trampled underfoot.

“Look, Joe, we must go back. Chris and the cook will be killed if we don’t.”

“It’s madness, Jack,” called out Jones, “they’ll run your pony down for sure.”

"Anyhow, I'm going," replied Jack, wheeling his terrified pony round on his haunches and dashing back in the face of the stampeding cattle.

"I'm with you, then," shouted Jones, turning his pony at the same time and following after Jack.

It was now a race as to whether the cattle or the two horsemen would reach the unfortunate boys first. The latter won by a matter of yards only. Jack seized Chris and dragged him up into the saddle, Jones doing the same service for the cook just as the vanguard of the cattle struck their ponies and swept them along with them.

CHAPTER IX

THE ICE-HOCKEY CHAMPIONS

THE herd of cattle swept onward as irresistible as the tide on the seashore. Chris scrambled into the saddle behind Jack, who vainly tried to control his pony. Gored and buffeted and terrified, the pony plunged madly on. To have attempted to resist the pressure of the cattle from behind would have been madness, for the pony would have been swept off his feet. As it was, Jack had the greatest difficulty in holding the pony up as he swept along in the vanguard of the stampeding herd.

It was a thrilling and memorable ride, seated on a pony mad with fright, and with a mob, several hundred strong, of charging cattle behind him. Despite the difficulties and the panicky nature of the situation, Jack did not lose his head. He knew that the cattle could not keep up this pace for long, and then would come his chance to forge ahead and get clear.

His deductions proved to be right, for pres-

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ently the cattle began to slow down and Jack seized every opportunity of pushing his pony through the herd in front of him, until in a few minutes, after much patience and skill, he eventually got clear. The pony needed no urging, and Jack was soon well ahead of the cattle. He edged off to the left until he was clear of them and then wheeled back, getting round and behind them. He pulled up his trembling, exhausted pony.

"Whew, you little pinto!" he said, bending over him, "we had a narrow squeak that time."

"You are right," said Chris from behind him, "and perhaps I had the narrowest squeak of all, for I hadn't an earthly chance of getting out of the way of them."

"That's so," remarked Jack coldly; "almost as narrow an escape as I had when Jones put the lights out."

Chris did not reply but slipped to the ground.

"I suppose I owe my life to you, Young," he said; then, taking out a note case he had, he picked out ten five-dollar notes.

"Here you are," he said, offering them to Jack; "I'd hate to owe anything to you, though I'm much obliged for coming to my help."

Jack looked down at the notes for a few

seconds before speaking, then observed sarcastically:

"Are you *quite* sure your life is worth that much? Personally, I don't think it is, and would be much obliged if you'd put that money back into your pocket."

Just then Jones, with the cook behind, rode up.

"Say, Jack, but I'm glad to see you safe. My time and attention were too much taken up to permit any distractions, and since that locoed herd of cattle struck us, I haven't seen you until now."

"You boys are sure made of the right stuff," broke in the cook enthusiastically. "I'd sure begun singin' hymns in expectation of a sudden an' speedy death when this seagoin' cow-puncher dashed in, picked me up, an' throwed me across th' saddle."

"Look," said Jack, "see the boys fighting the fire! Come on, Joe, let's hurry over to them."

They then rode over to where the camp had been. Its appearance suggested that it had recently been hit by a cyclone, for pots and pans were trampled into the ground and the kitchen was overturned.

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"Here, Jack," called out Jones, "catch hold of them empty oat sacks, an' we'll go over to help the boys. In the meantime, we'll tie the ponies up here."

About three hundred yards away the boys could be seen making tremendous efforts to put out the prairie fire, and already they were meeting with success. Empty oat sacks were being used with which to beat out the fire. Getting in behind the flames, the boys rapidly worked along the fringe of the fire until a wide gap had been cleared; they then divided and worked outward from this so that, after several hours' hard work, they had the fire under control and finally extinguished. It was a weary crowd, with blackened, scorched faces, that gathered around the cook that night.

The cook had shown his usual resourcefulness, and supplies had been obtained from ranchers in the neighborhood, who were only too pleased to give them in return for the invaluable services the boys had rendered, for the fire had been a very real and serious menace to them.

"Well boys," said Bill, "I reckon we'll need no cattle guards to-night, for the last I saw of them they were hittin' the trail West faster

than any express train. I guess we got some job on to-morrow roundin' 'em up again. Still, they're well on the way to the Q. Z., so we may not lose so much time, after all."

After water had been brought, the boys had a good sluice down and a happy evening followed. It is only in the crowded cities that men worry, not in the open plains.

The next morning they were all up early and pushed ahead in search of the cattle. They had not gone far before they came upon the bulk of them peacefully grazing. A few had become separated, but by night-time they had all been rounded up again. In a few more days they were back at the ranch with all the stragglers gathered in.

It had been a happy experience for Jack, and the open-air life was agreeing with him tremendously. He had grown taller since arriving at the Q. Z., and had become more muscular. In appearance he was as picturesque as the rest of the cow-punchers, with his loosely knotted, gaudily colored neckerchief, his woolly "chaps," and broad-brimmed Stetson hat.

The round-up had enabled him to resume his intimate companionship with Jones. As a cow-puncher the ex-sailor of the *Jersey* was second

to none on the Q. Z., but he did his work quietly and without ostentation; he was one of the least self-assertive of men and consequently attracted little notice to himself. To Bill, the foreman, he was only a steady, reliable cow-puncher; but to Jack he was a hero upon whom he lavished that measure of hero worship which only a boy can give. Jones, on the other hand, was inordinately proud of Jack, and never tired of talking about him. Over and over again he had detailed the incident on board the *Jersey* when Jack gallantly came to his assistance, and on the night of the prairie fire he gave the boys a vivid account of Jack's plucky rescue. Since that time no word had passed between Chris and Jack, but Mr. McIntosh, who had heard of the incident, came over to the bunk house and thanked Jack for his gallant conduct.

"Young," he said, "you are getting deeper and deeper into the debt of the people at the ranch house. As I am always saying, that was a lucky chance meeting I had with you and Jones; you are both made of the real stuff that makes good in this land of opportunity."

Of course Mr. McIntosh had not heard of how his nephew attempted to repay Jack's bravery in risking his own life to rescue him.

Jack had kept that a secret; he had not even told it to Jones. The ill-concealed hostility of Chris had not abated one jot. Gratitude was apparently a minus quantity in his nature.

With the shortening of the days and the coming of winter, life became a little less strenuous on the ranch. It also brought with it invitations to Jack to spend some of the long evenings at the ranch house, invitations which he was not slow to accept. In this way he met many of the owners of neighboring ranches and their families. There were many jolly dances and happy evenings. But best of all he loved the moonlight sleigh rides accompanied by the musical jingle of the bells as the sleigh skimmed over the frozen snow. His Stetson had given way to a fur cap, and the mackinaw coat he had had given him on the journey came in, as he said to Jones, "mighty useful."

Mr. McIntosh, knowing of the boys' passion for gambling, sought to give them other interests in healthy outdoor sports, and soon after the winter had set in there arrived at the Q. Z. ranch a complete outfit for ice hockey. Mr. McIntosh, in order to create a general interest in the game, offered a challenge cup to be competed for by the boys of neighboring ranches.

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This was enthusiastically taken up, and entries were received from the Circle-Bar, U-Bar, the T-N, the S-Cross, the Three-Bar, and the Q. Z. ranches.

Ice hockey became the prevailing topic, and the keenest rivalry was shown. Bill, the foreman, took the lead at the Q. Z., and a part of the large lake was cleared and smoothed down. Here trial games took place for the final selection of the seven players to represent the Q. Z. in their first game, which was against the U-Bar ranch.

A committee of three prominent ranchers took charge of the competition and made all the arrangements. The team from the Circle-Bar were established favorites, for two of the rancher's sons had distinguished themselves at the game while at college, and it was generally expected that their greater experience would just about enable them to win the trophy.

Mr. McIntosh was naturally very keen to see his boys win it, and each afternoon he could be found watching the trials, and discussing with Bill the merits of the different players. There were two or three who quickly established their claims to a place in the team, Chris being one of them, his speed and shooting ability mark-

ing him down as a certainty for one of the wing positions. Jones was another who was soon assured of a place in the team, his size, imperturbability, and quick eye making him an ideal goal keeper.

At first Jack was one of the "tryers," for he was not very familiar with the game, his only experience having been gained the previous winter during the short stay in the little Ontario town. He could skate well, however, and this was a very good asset. He only needed experience and this, as was usual with him, he spared himself no effort to obtain. His untiring energy and dash obtained for him, in the final selection, the important place of "rover," probably the hardest-worked player on the side. Jack was quite equal to this, though, for he was in excellent condition. The games were to be decided on the skating rink in town, which was kept in first-class condition. One of the games had already been decided, the Circle-Bar team having easily disposed of that from the T-N ranch by the one-sided score of eleven goals to nothing. The games were attracting widespread interest, and the crowd that gathered around the rink when Q. Z. met U-Bar was a truly representative one. When the teams took the ice

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there were noisy exclamations from their partisans.

“Come on, Q. Z.,” shouted Slim. “Eat ’em alive; you’ve got ’em buffaloed for a start.”

The game promised to be closely contested and was fought out with the greatest determination. The U-Bar team, to the accompaniment of a noisy demonstration from their supporters, were first to threaten danger. By a piece of pretty play they swept down on the Q. Z. goal, and one of the forwards, left with a clear opening, sent in the puck for what looked like a certain goal.

But Jones had anticipated this, and moved over in time to meet the puck with his pads. Some swift exchanges followed; the Q. Z. forwards swarmed round the U-Bars’ goal, and in a melee in front of the goal the puck was sent into the net. The supporters of the Q. Z. team immediately proceeded to empty their magazines, firing their revolvers into the air. It resembled nothing more nor less than a miniature battle. This put the U-Bar team on their mettle, and their “rover,” the captain, and by far the speediest and most skillful player on the side, next put in a brilliant solo effort. Getting hold of the puck near his own goal, he skated

through the opposing players until he had the Q. Z. goal at his mercy; but just as he was about to shoot, Jack skated over to him, traveling like a cyclone, and picked the puck off his stick in brilliant fashion. He had worked up such speed that he was unable to prevent himself from crashing into the boards protecting the rink. It was a great save and came in for well-deserved applause. The U-Bar boys were not to be denied, though, and shortly before the interval their captain broke through the Q. Z. defence and scored a pretty goal.

The interval arrived with the score one-all, which truly reflected the play, for it had been an evenly fought, dingdong game. The pace had been so hot that it seemed certain that stamina would decide the result, and Bill confidently assured Mr. McIntosh that his side would win. For the first few minutes of the second half the play was rather tame but, urged on by their supporters, the teams warmed up to their work. There was a groan of disappointment when Chris, after a pretty piece of individual play, shot past an open goal.

For the next few minutes the U-Bar forwards took possession of the game, and here both Jack and Jones played magnificently, defending the

goal in splendid fashion; but at the end of fifteen minutes' play the U-Bar forwards rushed the puck into the net. When the teams crossed over at the end of the third period the score was two goals to one in favor of the U-Bar team. It was now that the superior stamina of the Q. Z. boys began to tell, and the game had only been in progress two minutes when the equalizing goal was obtained. The U-Bar team were now pinned in their own half, and valiantly as they defended, the Q. Z. boys shot two more goals, and a strenuous game resulted in a victory for them by four goals to two.

It had been Jack's first real test, and he had acquitted himself well. His tackling had been daring and skillful, and his speed had enabled him to cover the goal and prevent the opposing forwards from getting to close quarters with Jones.

"You played a great game, Jack," Jones remarked to him as they were taking off their skates, "but you keep just a little too close to the goal. Next time you want to try a run through on your own. There's no better way of defending your own goal than by attacking your opponents."

Jack was always ready for tips, and deter-

mined to practice dashing through on his own. The result gave great satisfaction to Mr. McIntosh. "You boys are sure enough fighters," he said to them after the game, "and Bill had you all in pretty good shape. If we can't beat the Circle-Bar boys we can give them a good run for their money, and if you do beat them, there'll be one big celebration at my expense."

The following week the third game in the competition took place, and a hard-fought game resulted in a win for the Three-Bar team by five goals to three. Three teams were now left in the competition—the Circle-Bar, the Three-Bar, and the Q. Z. The draw resulted in a bye for the Q. Z. team, so on the day of the game between the Circle-Bar and the Three-Bar teams, Jack and Jones rode into town to witness it.

The sons of the owners of the Circle-Bar ranch dominated the game, their brilliant individual efforts completely demoralizing the opposing defence, and the final score was eight goals to three in their favor.

Jones had concentrated his attention on the tactics of the Circle-Bar team, and gave his deductions to Jack as they rode back to the ranch.

"D'you know, Jack, I'm not at all sure that we won't beat the Circle-Bar crowd. I watched 'em pretty closely, and they rely almost entirely on the two Healy boys. Did you see how easily their defence cracked up when the Three-Bar boys pulled themselves together and settled down to business? It's a two-man team and you must drop that covering game of yours and go for their goal every time. I'll take a chance with these two boys. The more we push their defence the less likely they will be to trouble me."

"Yes," replied Jack, "I believe you've got them pretty well sized up, Joe. I think you should talk to the boys about it; a little thinking before a game is better than a lot of talk and excusing afterward."

So Jones got the boys together, and as a result they practiced the attacking game and left the burden of the defence entirely on Jones's broad shoulders. They all knew that he could not be rattled, as Bill said; a goal or two would not in any way affect his play.

On the day of the game the town was as busy, as crowded and lively as on the day of the August Fair. Families from neighboring ranches drove in, and everywhere there was the merry

musical jingle of sleigh bells. Rough stands had been erected around the rink, all the ranchers giving a helping hand. Joan, well muffled in furs, was there with her father to cheer on the Q. Z. boys. The Circle-Bar team, by virtue of their easy victories, were the established favorites, and the Q. Z. team knew well the difficult task they were up against. The referee had been specially brought over from Calgary, and was a man who knew the game from A to Z. Both teams were given a rousing reception when they took the ice, and it was soon apparent that this was to be no ordinary game.

Jack was the hero of a sensational start. Getting hold of the puck in the first minute of the game, he dashed through the opposing players, and, never pausing to take aim, he swept the puck into the net before they had recovered from their astonishment. The Q. Z. supporters literally brought down the house, for the vigor of their applause, which was not altogether vocal, caused part of the hastily erected stand to collapse. But no one was hurt, and the game was resumed. The keenness of the play was responsible for a little ill feeling being introduced, but the referee quickly intervened, and the two offending players were sent off for a

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few minutes to give their heated passions time to cool down.

The puck traveled from end to end at an amazing pace, and excitement ran high. The two Healy boys swept through the Q. Z. defence, only to give Jones an opportunity of effecting a superb clearance. He sent the puck out to Jack, who in turn sent it to Chris, and the Q. Z. forwards swept down on the Circle-Bar goal. Chris sent in a well-directed shot, only to hit the goal keeper. It came out to a Q. Z. forward, who promptly flashed it into the net before the goal keeper had recovered, and so, at the end of seven minutes' play, the Q. Z. team were two goals up. The Healy boys began to get wise to the tactics of the Q. Z. team, and, despite the efforts of Jones, they rushed through three goals before the end of the first period. When the teams crossed over Jack repeated his former effort and made the game three-all. The Q. Z. forwards now overpowered the Circle-Bar defence, and two more goals rewarded their efforts, so that the score at the interval was five goals to three in their favor.

The game so far had been fought at a tremendous pace, and had been full of excitement and surprises. The Circle-Bar supporters had not

expected that their team would be in arrears at the interval, but the tactics that Jones had advised had been entirely successful. But more thrills and sensations were in store for the spectators, for within three minutes of the resumption of play the Circle-Bar team had drawn level. They had altered their methods, the team packing their own goal and depending upon the two Healy boys to raid the opposing goal. The Q. Z. then did the same, so that for a few minutes the game became slow.

Toward the end of the first period of the second half there were some fast exchanges, and Jones had to capitulate once more to the Healy boys, and on the resumption of the fourth and last period the Q. Z. team were a goal in arrears.

Jones called them together. "Take a chance, boys, pile in on them, rattle 'em, do everything but kill them unless you want them to beat us."

The result of this advice was a savage onslaught on the Circle-Bars' goal, which swept goal keeper and puck into the net. This success was loudly acclaimed by the Q. Z. supporters. Jack now joined issue with the Healy boys with surprising success, partly due to the fact that

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they had been carrying the team on their shoulders through a fast, strenuous game. His persistency finally took the sting out of the Circle-Bar attack, and he crowned a brilliant piece of checking by shooting a beautiful goal from thirty yards out. Two more goals followed in quick succession, and at the end of the game the Circle-Bar team was well beaten with the score nine goals to six. The Healy boys were the first to admit that Jack's stubborn persistence had finally spoiled their game, and this, added to the three brilliant goals he had scored, made him the hero of the occasion.

"Say, Jack," remarked Jones at the close of the game, "you are a bit of a tartar when you set your teeth into anything. The way you hung on to them Healy boys was funny to watch. I quite expected they'd turn on you an' smash you with their sticks."

Joan sought out Jack and congratulated him on his share in the triumph of the Q. Z. team, Mr. McIntosh kept his word to the boys, and the rejoicings at the Q. Z. ranch were kept up into the early hours of the morning.

"It seems mean, boys, somehow," Mr. McIntosh remarked in a little speech he made. "I offered the cup for competition, and the first resting place it finds is on my own sideboard."

CHAPTER X

LOST IN A BLIZZARD

THE competition for the cup had made ice hockey immensely popular in the district, and many games of a friendly nature took place until a spell of bad wintry weather compelled the ranchers to give their attention to the cattle and horses. Although it had been zero weather for many weeks, with occasional falls of fine, powdery snow, the stock out grazing had had no difficulty in getting at the nourishing prairie grass, and so caused the ranchers no anxiety. As long as such conditions prevailed there was ample time for recreation and indulgence in the favorite winter pastimes, and the boys, with their love for the open air, were not slow to take advantage of it.

One evening, at sunset, they received fair warning that these good times were, temporarily at any rate, coming to an end, for on each side of the setting sun were two miniature suns known as "sun dogs." And the "sun

dogs" never lied: their presence in the sky might very well be compared to the warning bark of the watchdog.

"Well, boys," remarked Bill that night, "I guess we'll all have to be up in th' mornin' an' round up the cattle. We've had a purty good spell of fine weather, and I guess she'll cut up rough now."

The darkness still lingered in the sky when Jack pulled the round fur cap over his ears, buttoned up his mackinaw coat, and tightened up his "chaps" preparatory to climbing into the saddle. Jones was already waiting.

"Looks bad, Jack," he remarked, "and feels worse; shouldn't be surprised if we caught it rough before we got back. It's a fifteen-mile ride to where Bill has asked us to go. I guess we'd better hit out at a good speed before she turns ugly."

"All right, lead the way, Joe," Jack replied cheerily, at the same time springing into the saddle. They faced a cold, piercing wind which compelled them to ride with heads lowered, and little conversation passed between them as they galloped across the prairie. The sky was a mass of darkening clouds, and the cattle they passed as they rode along, sensitive to all

changes in the weather, were lowing dismally and crowding together in their fear.

They reached the appointed place, rounded up the two or three stray cattle, and turned back toward the ranch with them. The wind now changed; instead of blowing steadily from one direction it became blustering and gusty. Presently a few flakes of snow, scarcely perceptible at first, began to fall.

"We must run the cattle, Jack," Jones advised, "for it looks an' feels as if we were in for something real bad in the shape of weather." And so they drove the cattle rapidly ahead, only halting them when it was necessary to round up small bunches some distance away. At first they rode off together to drive in these stray bunches, but as the snow began to fall faster and the wind became more blustering, they went in turn, while the one left behind proceeded to hustle along with the cattle already rounded up. This was done so that they might reach the ranch before the storm became worse.

Although the wind was piercingly cold, the thermometer registered only a few degrees of frost, between 15° and 20°, and the snowflakes were consequently a little larger than usual, and wet. They had rounded up over two hun-

dred head of cattle and were within two miles of the ranch when the storm showed unmistakable signs of developing into a blizzard. Presently, dimly perceptible through the whirling mass of snowflakes, they saw a small bunch of cattle, not more than from fifteen to twenty head.

"Look, Joe," called out Jack, "I'll just run over and round up that bunch; then we can run them all into the corral."

"I don't think I'd bother about them, Jack," Jones replied; "seems to me the weather's become uncommonly dirty the last few minutes, and might at any time become a ragin' blizzard. I think you'd better stay with me and get this lot home. In a few minutes we'll be back at the ranch, and that little bunch over there will most likely be all right."

"Oh, I won't be a minute, Joe, and it will just be as well to make sure of them;" saying which, Jack dashed off in the direction of the stray cattle now clustered together for warmth and companionship. They did not want to move, and gave Jack no end of trouble, while the increasing violence of the snowstorm added to his difficulties. It was some minutes before he got them moving in the direction he wanted them to

go. He calculated that Jones would have moved ahead some considerable distance, so he drove them toward a point where he thought he could effect a junction. With each minute the storm developed in violence, and the wet, stinging snowflakes which the wind, now developed into a gale, dashed into Jack's face made it next to impossible for him to look up. He fought the storm and the stubborn cattle, hoping every minute he would run into Jones. He seemed to have been fighting his way for hours and still there was no sign of Jones, when at last he decided to leave the cattle and set out in search of him.

The storm had now become a raging blizzard; the wind blew from no particular direction, but from all directions at once, and it was perceptibly colder; it whirled the mass of snowflakes about him until he became dizzy and exhausted. In less than an hour the thermometer had dropped more than thirty degrees, so that the snow froze on to his eyelashes and face and crusted his clothing. Then there followed a struggle with his pony. The latter pulled to go in one direction, while Jack stubbornly disputed with it, and insisted upon its going in a direction almost entirely opposite.

His one idea now was to get back to the ranch. His pony at last gave up the struggle and yielded readily to every pull on the lines. The poor, faithful little beast was crusted with frozen snow. Had Jack for once yielded to its sure instinct it would have taken him home. It had fought with him for it, and having at last yielded, it went forward with lowered head and in a kind of stupor. The continued exposure and the steadily increasing cold soon began to make their effects felt on Jack.

First it was his right hand that became numb and lifeless. With an effort he tore off the frozen glove, and at the first glance he knew it was frozen, so dismounted and rubbed it with snow until the circulation, accompanied by stinging pain, came back into it. He climbed back into the saddle and roused his pony, and for a few minutes it galloped rapidly in the direction that, if followed, Jack was sure would bring them home at last. On they pressed in the face of the whirling, stinging snowflakes. Occasionally Jack raised his lowered head in the hope that out of the whirling mass of whiteness there would emerge some recognizable landmark; and each time he lowered his head again with a sob of despair and disappointment.

At last he gave it up. He was lost!—lost in a raging blizzard, blinded by snow, and with a deadly paralysis creeping over his limbs and faculties. Now he stumbled along on foot, leading his pony, in an effort to keep the circulation going through his frozen limbs; then, exhausted by this, he dragged himself back into the saddle and rode along in a stupor. He fought desperately with an overpowering desire to lie down and go to sleep. How delightfully drowsy he was becoming! It seemed as if some seductive voice was urging him to stretch himself out on the prairie and quietly fall asleep. He fought to overcome this creeping inertia, and, though benumbed and half frozen, he struggled on his way.

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Jack had not been gone many minutes before Jones fell in with two riders from the Q. Z. who had been sent out to assist those who had not yet returned.

“Come on, boys, let’s keep ’em hustling,” he called out. “Young will catch up with us, for he’s only gone after a bunch over to the right.”

The three riders soon got the cattle moving at a good pace, and it was not long before they

were running them into a corral already well filled. Mr. McIntosh greeted them as they rode up.

"Good work, boys," he called out; "it's a dirty day, and I'm afraid it'll be rough on any cattle left out. You boys have worked hard to-day, and there's only a few hundred head that we haven't got into corrals. When she lets up we'll soon get them into a place where we can feed them a little hay until they're able to go out and rustle for themselves. You look pretty well done up, Jones; had a long ride?"

"Yes, boss," replied Jones, "went fifteen miles out this mornin'."

"That so, now! But you didn't go alone surely?"

"No, Young went with me; I left him a little way back—expect he'll be along in a few minutes."

"I certainly hope so," said Mr. McIntosh, "for unless he's here pretty soon he's in for a rough time, and I'd hate to see anything happen to that boy. Let me know when he gets back, Jones, will you?" he asked as he rode away.

"I will, boss, for I'll be mighty anxious myself until he arrives," called out Jones.

The corrals were now jammed with cattle, for they were the least capable of all the stock on the ranch of taking care of themselves in a storm. They either followed the storm, whichever direction it went, or else they simply stood huddled together, and often fell frozen as they stood. Horses, on the other hand, did not take adverse conditions so quietly. They pawed incessantly through the snow, always getting a little food and keeping the circulation going by the vigor of their movements. Jones had been among the last of the riders to return, and he was stiffened and frozen as he made his way to the bunk house.

Hot coffee had been prepared, so that returning riders might have a warm drink. Wood was piled on to the stove and the place was sizzling hot. The boys, after their long exposure, appreciated the warmth and comfort, and drew up the wooden benches to the stove while they proceeded to fill their pipes. Outside the blizzard raged, showing no signs of abatement.

"Well, sirree," Slim remarked, "but this storm sure beats anythin' I ever seed. Reckon there'll be some hundred of cattle go west in this. I'm glad to be seated snug an' cozy round this lil' ol' fire a-toastin' me feet."

"Yes, I guess you are," Jones chipped in, "but Jack Young's walking around somewhere in that blizzard, lost to the wide."

"We mustn't worry about him yet a while," Bill remarked; "maybe he's wandered off to some other ranch, most likely the Three-Bar. He'll probably show up when this storm blows over."

"I wish I could feel the same way about it, but I've got a notion that the boy's in trouble, an' I feel mean to be sittin' in front of this fire and that boy most likely wandering round in the snow."

"Oh, we mustn't give up hope yet, Joe; and if he doesn't show up pretty soon most likely some of the boys will be willing to ride round for a little while to see if they can find him."

"Yes, sirree, we sure will," called out Slim above the shouts of the rest of the boys, "a lil' bit of snow won't a-keep me from lookin' for that boy."

The minutes passed and Jack still failed to show up. While the rest of the boys joined noisily in their favorite card game, Jones paced uneasily the floor of the bunk house, a great fear clutching at his heart.

"It's no good, Bill," he called out at last,

"I simply can't stand this suspense. I'm going to saddle up and go and look for that boy, and I'd be mighty obliged to any boy that cares to take a ride with me."

"I'm a-going 'long with you," Slim called out, "for I'm mighty anxious meself, an' will feel better if I take a ride 'long with you, Joe."

The boys threw aside the cards and, under Bill's supervision, a systematic search was organized.

"Better go in two pairs, boys," Bill advised, "for it's a wicked day, and a couple of riders could soon be separated. And be very careful of your direction."

The twenty riders separated into groups of four, and gallantly rode out into the fierce, blinding storm in search of their lost companion. It seemed to be a hopeless search from the beginning, for the whirling snowflakes compelled them to ride with lowered heads and, when only a few yards out, the ranch buildings were blotted out from their sight.

"Well, sirree," Slim remarked to Jones from the depth of his fur collar, "unless that boy has got into some shelter I'm 'fraid he's done for by now. We've only bin out for half an hour, an' I don't mind admittin' that I'm purty near all in meself."

"You're right, Slim," Jones replied, "and much as I hate to turn back I can't expect you boys to go on any farther. We can only hope that some of the others have found him."

It was no easy matter to steer a straight course for home, but Slim, who rode one of the oldest cow ponies on the ranch, led the way, wisely giving a free hand to his pony. With unerring instinct it led them back to the ranch, to find that most of the boys had already returned but without any news of Jack. Though cold and exhausted, they refused to return to the bunk house until the last rider had returned. Mr. McIntosh, together with Joan muffled up in a fur coat, were among the group awaiting the return of the search parties.

"I'm afraid we've got to give up hope, Bill," he remarked, as the last party of four returned.

"I'm afraid so, boss, an' I can tell you we are all mighty sorry, for he was a real good boy an' popular with everybody."

The group of boys stood round talking and discussing Jack's disappearance. Poor Jones was broken-hearted.

"You know, Slim," he said, "something told me not to let that boy go after that bunch of cattle; but you know what he was like. He'd never be satisfied until he saw there was——"

The talking ceased abruptly, while everybody looked up with strained eyes; for stumbling toward them, crusted with a white coating of frozen snow, came a horse, astride of which was a rider with eyes closed and drawn face, swaying in the saddle from side to side.

"My God!" shouted Jones, "it's Jack! it's Jack!" and ran to seize the pony, which, with the snow crusted on its eyelashes, could scarcely see, and the weary way it dragged its legs showed how near to the point of final exhaustion it was. As soon as hands reached out to him Jack collapsed, unconscious, while the boys carried him toward the bunk house.

"Be careful, boys, that no parts of him are frozen before you take him inside," advised Mr. McIntosh. The boys drew off his gloves and found both hands frozen, so they quickly applied snow and got a healthy color back into them. They practically undressed him outside, for there were few parts of his body not touched by frost. They then carried him into the bunk house, wrapped him in blankets, and applied restoratives.

In the meantime his pony had been treated no less tenderly. The faithful little creature,

when at last it found that its master's control had gone, had set itself the task of taking him back to the ranch and to safety. It bore no ill will toward the rider who had set aside its own sure instinct and so condemned it to hours of aimless wandering and exposure; but had gladly started back, dragging along its stiffened, frozen limbs until it stumbled through the gate and found ready hands waiting to assist it. Strongest and most faithful of man's many animal friends, patiently submitting to a control that is frequently foolish and often cruel, it is difficult to speak too highly of the horse or to lavish upon it a greater affection than it deserves.

After recovering consciousness Jack, in spite of the pain from his frostbites, immediately fell into a sound, peaceful sleep that lasted for several hours, in fact until the middle of the following day.

Jones came to him as soon as he was awake. "Jack," he said, reaching out his hand, "I'm jolly glad to see you lying there safe an' sound. I was sure worried to death about you yesterday, and cursed meself in proper style for havin' allowed you to go off after them cattle."

"That was all my own fault, Joe," replied Jack, "though I never dreamed that I should have lost sight of you so soon."

"I guess you had a pretty rough time of it, didn't you?" asked Jones.

"I certainly did," answered Jack; "just sit down on the side of the bunk there and I'll tell you all about it.

"After leaving you I was soon alongside of that bunch of cattle, but I could scarcely get them moving, and all the time the storm was getting worse. When I did get them going it was impossible to see more than a few yards, and, of course, quite impossible to see anything of you. I drove the cattle ahead, though not very quickly, for you know how they hate to move." Jones nodded his agreement. "At first," continued Jack, "I thought it would only be a matter of minutes before I caught up with you, so did not worry much. Then, after I had been traveling for nearly an hour I began to get anxious, so I left the cattle and went in search of you. I rode hard at first, making sure that I would catch up with you; then I decided to make for the ranch. I was confident it would only be a matter of minutes before I hit it. It was impossible to look up, even if I could

have seen any distance. At first I was sure of my direction, though the pony kept pulling off to the right, and so I rode on and on, hoping each minute to see the ranch buildings loom up in front of me. More than once I had to rub my hands with snow when I felt all sensation go out of them, and often my face was frozen too. It took hours before I would admit to myself that I was lost, and by that time I was on the verge of collapse. Then I walked for what seemed like ages, only climbing into the saddle when too tired to drag along. I gradually fell into a stupor, with an overpowering desire to lie down and sleep. It was a terrible temptation, and it needed every ounce of will power I had to fight against it. At last there came a time when I couldn't drag one leg past another, and I remember very dimly the struggle I had to climb back into the saddle. I was past the stage of caring whether I was frozen or not. I couldn't grip the lines, and barely managed to hold on to them.

"The rest is almost all a blank to me. Occasionally I just saved myself from falling out of the saddle, and these were really the only moments I had of consciousness. I was terribly drowsy and strangely warm, though I suppose

that was because I had got beyond feeling the cold. Then I heard sounds of shouting, but it all sounded so far away. I must have collapsed then, for the next thing I remembered was that I was lying in my bunk, with stinging pains in nearly every part of my body. By the way, Joe, they are still there, too."

As Jack concluded his story Mr. McIntosh walked into the bunk house.

"Well, how's Young to-day?" he called out, and after Jack had replied he continued, "Mrs. McIntosh has sent down for you, Young, and insists that some of the boys shall carry you over. She's got a bedroom fixed up all snug for you, and you've simply got to go."

Jack was only too pleased, so they carried him over to the ranch house, and for the second time Jack became an inmate, enjoying all the comforts and attention that Mrs. McIntosh could lavish upon him. And in this she was well supported by Joan, so that in a very short time Jack forgot the harrowing experiences he had passed through when lost in the blizzard.

CHAPTER XI

THE RUNAWAYS

THE period of Jack's convalescence, a delightfully pleasant and happy time to him, only lasted for two weeks. The most distressing thing was the frostbites, for few parts of his body had escaped. His friendship with Joan rapidly developed. She related for his enjoyment stories that had been handed down from her grandfather's days when the West was the land of the strong man and only the fittest survived—of the days when each man was a law to himself, and justice could only be obtained by his own hand. Most romantic of all were the tales of the coming of those picturesque figures which compelled respect for law and order wherever they went—the Northwest Mounted Police. The fearless, impartial way they had carried out their duties in the face of the organized opposition made a thrilling and heroic story.

The few days following the blizzard had involved a lot of hard work for the boys at the

Q. Z., for it had been followed by a period of intense cold, which had necessitated the feeding of hundreds of head of cattle. Those ranchers who had neglected the precautions taken by Mr. McIntosh had suffered heavily, for hundreds of cattle had perished in the blizzard and during the bitter weather that had followed.

Although it was still very cold when Jack returned to his duties, the weather was fine enough to permit of the large majority of the cattle being turned out to graze, only the young stock being kept in the corrals and fed. One of the first jobs Jack was detailed off for was the cutting of ice for use during the summer months, and in this he had as his companion the rancher's nephew, Chris. The relationship between them was not one of extreme cordiality, though there was no sign of that open hostility on the part of Chris that had characterized his attitude toward Jack during the greater part of his stay on the Q. Z. ranch.

Jack was too good-natured to harbor any ill feelings toward Chris, for, after all, he remembered that Chris was the nephew of the man who had been such a kind and genuine friend to him. Though Chris was surly and showed his ill temper on the slightest occasion, the days

were by no means unhappy ones for Jack. Cutting ice was good, healthy exercise, and Jack marveled at the thickness of it, varying from two to four feet. The greatest difficulty was in cutting out the first block, after which the work was fairly straightforward, the only difficulty being in dragging out the blocks after they had been cut. This work took up their time for over a week.

"Well, boys," remarked Mr. McIntosh, at the end of this period, "I think we've got about enough in now to last us through the summer. The next thing you'd better do, Chris, is to gather up some of those old trees that came down on the flood last spring. The frost will be breaking pretty soon, and when that happens we'll all be too busy to pay much attention to these little things. Better take the wagon box off and take a couple of teams with you. By the way, what about hitching up that nice little mare we broke in last fall? She's never been hitched up yet, so if you put her in along with some steady horses it'll do her good."

So it was decided that the next job Chris and Jack should do together would be to gather up some old trees for firewood.

"Well, Jack," remarked Jones that night,

"how are you getting on with Chris? Any more set-to's?"

"Oh, no," replied Jack, "we say little and work a lot."

"I suppose you've finished gettin' up ice, and you're comin' back along of us now?"

"No; Mr. McIntosh has given us another job—gathering up logs for firewood from the river bottom. We're taking a couple of teams and going down there in the morning."

Since the time of the blizzard and with the near approach of spring, popularity in ice hockey had been on the wane, and poker was the popular pastime.

"Not playing cards to-night, Joe?" queried Jack.

"Now, why should you be askin' that of me, Jack? Don't you know that I've never touched a card since we left the *Jersey*? Have no time for the game now. You don't know how much I hated spongin' on you after we left the *Jerséy*, and I swore that I'd never touch the cards again; and mighty glad I've been of it, too. For the first time in my life I've got a nice little balance at the bank, and it's surprising the amount of pleasure I get from just watchin' it grow. I've got ambitions now, Jack, and if you

don't mind me becoming confidin' like, I'll tell you what they are."

"Not a bit, Joe," replied Jack, "as Slim would say, 'shoot.'"

"Well, I'm hopin' some day that you and I will be able to start up a partnership and have a ranch of our own—the J. J. ranch. What's your idea about it, Jack?"

"Splendid, Joe, splendid!" replied Jack. "Rather funny, too, for that's right in line with my own ambitions, and that five hundred dollars I was lucky enough to get has made my bank balance look nice and respectable, too."

"I'm pleased to hear you say that, Jack; and now I've got an idea that might help us along. I suppose you've been reading in the papers about the big Stampede they're organizing for the fall to take place in Calgary? One of them prizes is five thousand dollars for the best display of 'bull-doggin'.' Now, without wanting to boast, I consider I'm no slouch in that line, and when the Stampede comes off I'll be right in the line to take my chance."

"And I'll bet you win it, Joe," said Jack enthusiastically.

"Oh, I'm not going to be too sure about that,

Jack," continued Jones, "but I'll have a good try."

"Yes, and I see there are prizes both for bronchobusting and roping, and I don't see why I shouldn't be one of the competitors if I put in plenty of practice."

"Well, seeing the way you catch on to things, I shouldn't be the least bit surprised if you don't pull off one or both of them."

The following morning Jack and Chris were up early and started off to gather up logs. There were few good trails leading to the river bottom, and even the best of them were very steep and difficult to negotiate. After they got down they found they had to go some distance before they came to anything suitable. The little mare behaved fairly well, though more than once she was difficult to control. She was, however, hitched up with a fairly steady, though by no means docile, gelding, and as both boys knew thoroughly how to handle them, she was kept in hand.

They had gone along the river bottom for over a mile before they had gathered a load. This done, they roped the logs together, unhitched the horses and gave them a feed, and also ate the lunch they had brought with them.

"Guess it's too far to go back to the main trail, Young," remarked Chris. "I see a bit of a trail leading up that hog's-back there; think we'd save time by trying it."

"Yes, I think we could try it," Jack replied, "though it looks something like the side of a house from here."

The trail, barely distinguishable, was very narrow, and looking at it from a distance it seemed almost impossible to drive horses and a wagon along it, particularly the first fifty yards. As it approached the top leading on to the prairie it still remained narrow, though less steep; but on each side, should the wagon sway and slip, there was a sheer drop of a hundred feet or more.

As soon as the horses were finished feeding they hitched them up again and prepared to move.

"Here, Young," said Chris, "you take these lines for the horses in the shafts, and I'll drive the leaders. You may be handier than I am with your fists, but I guess I know more about driving horses."

"Oh, I wouldn't be so sure about that," replied Jack, "for if I remember right, I think you made the same mistake before."

"Oh, well, we won't argue," replied Chris in a surly tone; "we'll take the first fifty yards on the gallop, and keep them hustling until we get to the top."

They arranged seats for themselves on the logs, which were piled up fairly high, and then moved off. As they approached the trail they roused the horses, and started the ascent at a gallop. It was a thrilling struggle to get over that first fifty yards, and at one time it seemed as if the horses were to be beaten. They were almost at a standstill before they negotiated this dangerous and difficult part. The two boys urged them on, Chris working himself up into a frenzy of excitement, not unmixed with fear. It soon became apparent to Jack that they would have their hands full before they reached the top. To have allowed the horses to stop would have been fatal, and as they plunged madly ahead the loaded timbers swayed dangerously. The excitement finally proved too much for the little mare, and it soon became apparent that she was out of control.

Jack was quick to see that it now depended upon the leaders, for they were the stronger team. At the same time, he exerted all his strength in an effort to bring the mare under

control again, and just as it appeared that he was about to succeed, the gelding, an erratic brute at any time, became affected by the antics of his companion and took the bit between his teeth. They were now only a few yards from the top and, desperate as the situation was, Jack was hopeful that, once out on the prairie for a straight run, he could get them back under control again. At the same time he realized the peril they were in, for the two horses, blinded by fear, would have swerved but for the leaders ahead, and a foot one way or the other meant a sheer drop to a certain death. Up to this time Chris, fully occupied with the leaders, had not seen what was happening, but the frantic efforts of the two horses hitched to the wagon quickly called his attention to the fact that they were out of control. Jack caught the motion of his head.

"Yes, yes, I know," he called out desperately; "don't mind them—keep the leaders going."

But Chris, becoming frantic from fear, foolishly dropped the lines of the leaders and grabbed the others from Jack. Then the leaders, steady and reliable up to this period, feeling the control over them gone and spurred on

into fear by the runaways behind, dashed wildly ahead.

The wagon for a moment trembled on the very edge of a precipice; it seemed that nothing could save them, and Jack had given up hope, when a sudden jerk dragged them clear and out on to the prairie.

Full of peril as the situation was, there was still a hope left that the two teams might run themselves out, when Chris, who had taken the lines from Jack, threw them wildly to one side and jumped clear of the load of logs.

The leaders, fairly steady at ordinary times, were blind through fear, and to Jack's horror they swung round and headed straight for the coolies.

Unless something miraculous happened it would all be over in a few seconds. The only thing now for him to do was to jump clear. He made the attempt, but—*his foot was caught in the logs!* The wild movements of the horses and the sudden jerks had disturbed the logs, and it was only when he attempted to jump that Jack realized that one of his feet was wedged.

He was trapped, and a few seconds would decide his fate. The leaders had almost reached

the edge of the coolie, when Jack gave one final despairing tug to free his foot; it came clean out of his boot!

He had no time to jump, so threw himself sideways off the logs. Before he had time to scramble to his feet he heard a deafening crash, and looked up just in time to see the wagon and logs turn end over end and fall with a sickening crash on the two horses hitched to it. The wagon pole had dropped and had stuck into the ground, and in a twinkling the wagon and logs had turned over to fall on the two poor brutes underneath. This stopped the leaders, who now stood trembling on the brink of a steep coolie.

Just as Jack was getting up Chris came along. "I thought you were done for that time, Young; but why didn't you jump?"

"I couldn't—my foot was caught," replied Jack angrily. "You see the mess you've made by losing your head. Looks to me as though there are two dead horses under those logs."

"Well, what about it?" growled out Chris, who knew only too well that he had played anything but a heroic part in the episode, and resented Jack's perfectly justifiable comments; "there are plenty more horses, and I'm quite satisfied to have saved my own skin."

"Oh, well, it's no use arguing about it now," replied Jack, "but you're in charge, so what d'you propose doing next?"

"Unhitch the leaders, of course; then see what we can do to get at the other two horses."

"Don't you think it just as well to leave the leaders where they are?" queried Jack. "Seems to me that the wagon and logs are dangerously near to the edge of the coolie. They can always hold it from slipping over until we can move some of the logs and see what can be done for the poor brutes underneath."

"Oh, that's all right, it can't slip now," replied Chris.

"As you say, then; if it does slip it's your funeral, not mine," answered Jack, with a shrug.

They swung the two leaders round and proceeded to unhitch them. Three of the traces had been taken off, and Jack was busy unhitching the fourth and last when it suddenly tightened. Very slowly, but unmistakably, the horses and wagon were slipping over the edge of the coolie!

"Look out!" yelled Jack, "they're going over." The words were scarcely out of his

mouth when the thing he had feared and warned Chris about had happened. It was a sickening and fearful sight, and very distressing to one who loved horses as passionately as did Jack. Horses, wagon, and logs turned over and over as they rolled down the side of the steep bank, while the big horse, which was attached by one trace, slid down on its haunches, looking for all the world like a big dog.

"Well, that's done it," said Jack, "and it fairly breaks my heart to see those poor brutes of horses."

"What's the good of getting sentimental about horses, Young? There's enough of them on the Q. Z. to take the place of those two."

"Well, you may feel that way about it, but I hate to look on, for we're partly to blame for this."

Fortunately the wagon and horses rolled into a strong, thick clump of bushes when they had got about halfway down the side of the coolie. Jack immediately slid down (it was too steep for walking) and unhitched the horse which was clear of the wreckage. Underneath the wagon and logs lay the other two horses groaning in pain.

"Come on, Young," shouted Chris from

above, "let's be getting back to the ranch. We can't do any good here now. I'll get the old man to send some of the boys along to clear up this mess."

"If you'll come down," replied Jack, "I think we can get one of the horses clear."

"Oh, I'm not coming; been mixed up in this mess long enough now," answered Chris.

So Jack, unable to do anything single-handed, puzzled over the best way to get the horse, which had been dragged down, and which he had succeeded in finally unhitching, up out of the coolie. Fortunately, horses are much surer-footed than men, and not only did it scramble up itself, but it also dragged Jack up along with it.

When Jack reached the top Chris was already some distance away, riding back to the ranch on the only horse that had been freed before the overturned wagon had slipped over the edge.

Now Jack was without a boot on one foot, and it was a cold day, with the thermometer several degrees below zero; and as the excitement subsided, he began to realize that his foot was getting very cold. It had not entirely escaped the frost on the day he had been lost in the blizzard, and so was still very sensitive.

He wound his handkerchief round it, and then climbed up on to the horse and followed after Chris.

When Jack arrived back at the ranch he found Chris already giving details of the accident.

"I did everything I could to stop them, uncle," he was saying, "but that kid Young was absolutely to blame. He allowed them to get out of control, and then sat in the wagon frozen with fear until the whole thing nearly turned over on top of him."

"Oh, well, Chris, we won't go into that. Personally, I think Young is a very steady, reliable boy and not easily rattled," replied Mr. McIntosh. "I'll send some of the boys over to see what can be done."

"Well, Young," he called out to Jack, "been mixed up in more accidents? Hope you're no worse for it."

"No, I'm all right, sir; I only lost a boot," answered Jack.

"How did that happen?"

"My foot got wedged in the logs and I couldn't get it out. Finally my foot came out of the boot, and so I was able to roll clear before the wagon overturned."

"Oh, I see; so that's how it was," remarked Mr. McIntosh, glancing significantly at Chris. "We needn't worry over the horses, but I'm mighty glad to see that you two boys came out of it all right."

A party of the boys rode over to the scene of the accident and proceeded to extricate the horses. One of them was a little bruised, but otherwise all right. The other was so badly injured that it had to be shot where it lay. Jack's boot, in perfectly good condition, was found among the wreckage, and Jones, who was one of the party, brought it back with him.

"Say, Jack," he remarked, "how did you contrive to get those horses and that wagon and logs into that place?"

So Jack gave him a detailed account of the events leading up to the accident, together with the conversation he had overheard passing between Mr. McIntosh and Chris.

"Don't you worry about that, Jack; you know pretty well that that boy has no use for you, and after the way you put him out I'm not surprised. If any one had hit me as hard as you hit him I'm calculatin' that I wouldn't feel so powerful friendly toward him."

"Yes, but he asked for it," argued Jack.

"Well, he can never complain that he didn't get what he asked for," replied Jones.

The next day Chris and Jack took another wagon and other horses and, avoiding the perilous route they had followed the previous day, they brought back a load of logs. They continued working at this until sufficient had been collected. The winter now showed signs of breaking up, and it was not long before the boys joyfully threw away their fur caps for the more picturesque and comfortable Stetsons. All was bustle and movement on the ranch, and the cattle were given greater freedom to roam. Jack was soon to enjoy the excitement and thrills of breaking in bronchos, an experience to which he eagerly looked forward.

CHAPTER XII

THE OUTLAW BRONCHO

THE return of spring was the signal for increased activity on the Q. Z. ranch, and Jack fully participated in this. He had now been a cow-puncher for over a year, but his inexperience in the early part of the previous spring had prevented him from taking his part in the branding of the young stock and in the breaking in of bronchos. He had watched with envy as the skilled riders and ropers did their work, and had assisted occasionally in some of the minor duties.

The summer had almost ended before he had developed that skill with the rope that had enabled him to play so successful a part in the capture of the cattle rustlers. His mastery over the half-wild bronchos had never yet been fully tested. It is true that he had ridden some of the fiercest and wildest horses on the ranch, but only after they had been broken. As he remarked to Jones, he had never tackled them raw.

This was an experience he eagerly looked forward to, and he fervently hoped that he would be given a chance to test his abilities. Though fully realizing the severity of the test he might be subjected to, he had great confidence in the result.

He had also received a promise from Jones that he would instruct him in the dangerous and difficult art of "bull-dogging," in which Jones was amazingly expert and efficient.

The spring was well advanced before they ran in the first batch of young cattle for branding, and Jack was immensely pleased when Bill detailed him off as one of the two riders to do the roping. No one could have done it more efficiently and skillfully than he did.

The young steer, or whatever it happened to be, was roped from opposite directions, so that as soon as he was thrown, the ropes were tightened and the steer lay helpless. A red-hot iron, shaped with a Q and a Z, was then pressed into its hide. In this way the ownership of the animal was definitely and legally claimed, and it belonged to Mr. McIntosh until he disposed of it. Any one found in possession of an animal bearing this brand was obliged, when called upon, to produce documents showing that it had

come into his possession in a legal and proper manner, failing which, he could be convicted of theft. And so it was that the wise rancher was always careful to "cut out" any strangers when he was driving a bunch of his cattle or horses into an inclosure.

The necessity for this branding, cruel as it might appear to be, will be readily appreciated. It was impossible for a rancher who owned thousands of head of cattle and horses to prevent them from straying, and, of course, he could not claim them on the score of recognition. It was by no means an easy job that Jack had, but he simply reveled in his work.

Later on the young horses were run in for the same purpose, and these made a much greater demand upon the skill and ability of the "ropers." They moved with lightning-like swiftness, and it needed rapid thinking and sound judgment to get the rope over them.

It was a wonderful experience for Jack, and he fairly excelled himself; but his cup of joy was brimming over when Bill, practiced cow-puncher that he was, said, "Boy, you're sure a wonder at handlin' the rope, and I'll back you against any one in these parts. Ropin' seems to be a natural gift with you, an' I believe you

could slip it over a streak of lightnin' if you tried."

After the branding was finished the attention of the boys was turned to the exciting and dangerous work of breaking in bronchos, and it was now Jack's turn to play more or less the part of looker-on. It gave Chris an opportunity to display his skill, and he took the fullest possible advantage of it. He successfully tackled many vicious brutes, and was never backward in giving himself praise for some wonderful work he did; so much so that Jones, who rarely commented on any one, was constrained to remark to Jack:

"That boy is sure some rider, but don't he know it? He thinks there's nothing standing on four legs that he can't master, but he makes a mistake there, an' sure as fate he's going to be disconnected from the saddle, and the sooner the better, both for himself an' the rest of us." And in saying this Jones expressed the thoughts and wishes of all the boys on the ranch.

But Chris was by no means the only one who could successfully tackle vicious bronchos, for Slim showed just as much ability and did his work so imperturbably that no one envied him his reputation. Slim had known what it was,

as Jones had expressed it, to be "disconnected from the saddle," and, though such an event rarely occurred, Slim knew that every once in a while "a real Indian" came along, and then, said he, "I quit."

The work was by no means confined to one or two riders, for all the boys took their turn at it, Jack with the rest. Jack was lucky in his first essays at bronchobusting for, though the horses were wild enough, they were not vicious and he gradually gained a knowledge of their favorite tricks. Allied to his wildness, the broncho has, if it can be so described, a very nimble wit. You can watch the changing expression in his eyes as he finds himself baffled; sometimes it is surprise at the non-success of his antics, sometimes blazing fury at being worsted, and sometimes cunning as he thinks out new moves. He keeps the rider keyed up to the highest pitch, for it is a battle of wits, and the rider who fails to concentrate all his intelligence and energies on the task in hand frequently finds himself rolling in the dust.

Jack's intelligence and enthusiasm for his job were great assets to him, and he came out of his duels with credit. A success for the

broncho was a dangerous thing, for he gained confidence and increased his cunning.

One day a beautifully built, clean-limbed sorrel or chestnut gelding was run into the corral. The way he rolled his eyes as he stood in the center of the corral was a warning to the boys handling him that here was something unusual to tackle. He was roped, thrown, and saddled in a very short time, and then one of the boys jumped nimbly into the saddle as he struggled to his feet. At first he stood perfectly still, unheeding all persuasions to get him to move. The uncertainty of knowing just what trick he intended to play first is a very disturbing and unsatisfactory experience for the rider; it "keeps him guessing." He prepares himself for one thing, and invariably the horse does something entirely different, and unless the rider can quickly pull himself together and counter this move, the broncho is victorious. The rider prefers even a hurricane duel to this suspense of waiting for an animal to "lay his cards on the table," as Slim expressed it.

Now this particular broncho only showed a "card" at a time, and that only at long intervals. He remained perfectly still for from two

to three minutes, and when he did move it seemed that he had been gathering together all his energies to throw them into one supreme effort. He made a wild leap into the air, came down on his front feet, shot out his hind legs with tremendous force, and then looked calmly down at his opponent rolling in the dust.

Now, ordinarily, the experienced cow-puncher would laugh at such a trick to dislodge him; but the unexpectedness of it, together with the concentrated energy thrown into it, would have unseated most riders.

"Holy mackinaw!" remarked the man, as he scrambled to his feet, "but that animal is some kicker; if you tied me on with ropes, he'd bust the ropes an' get me off just the same."

When once a broncho had thrown a rider he was turned over to another who was more experienced and capable, so Slim was deputed to tackle him. He was again roped and thrown, and when he struggled to his feet Slim was in the saddle. Again he stood perfectly still; then after a time he tried, by the same method, to repeat his former success, but only succeeded in dislodging Slim's hat. The look of surprise in his eyes was quickly followed by another of fury and then of cunning. There was a long

pause before the next move was attempted; then he deliberately rolled over sideways! Slim nimbly slipped out of the saddle in time to avoid being crushed, and was back into it again when the broncho regained his feet. Then again those changing expressions and that deliberate pause. His next move was executed with amazing rapidity, and he threw his whole energy into it. He swung himself round on his hind legs with such swiftness and energy that Slim was sent rolling over and over in the dust.

"Well, sirree," he exclaimed, "I sure thought that a cyclone happened along just now, but I suppose it must have been that broncho. I hate to say quit, but I'm willin' to let some one else have a try at him before I renew his acquaintance."

"Guess we'll send for the boss's nephew," remarked Bill, "for I think we've got some-
thin' a bit unusual here."

So Chris was sent for, and approached his task with such an air of jaunty self-assurance that the boys were fervently hoping to see him come a cropper. And that he did in a remarkably short space of time.

The broncho changed his tactics; he lashed out in a fury of rage, doubtless resenting the

persistence of these two-legged creatures. It required all Chris's skill and nimbleness to get into the saddle, and when he did so the broncho rushed madly toward the corral fence, stopped dead in front of it, and neatly pitched Chris off his back and over it. Up to the present the unusual thing about the broncho, and the thing that had gained for him such notable victories, had been his great strength. When in action he was a fiend incarnate.

Fortunately for Chris, he had been pitched over on to some loose straw, otherwise he might have been seriously hurt, for he had been thrown with great force.

Bill now asked for volunteers, and one after the other made an attempt to master the animal, but never with complete success.

"Well, sirree," remarked Slim after he had been thrown for the third time, "it's only once in years that a brute as wise an' as wicked happens along. I guess, Bill, we'll have to give him up for a bad one."

"Yes, I'm 'fraid so, Slim, unless any more of the boys'd like to take a throw."

"I'd like to take a try at him, Bill," remarked Jack.

"Well, boy, there he is; just hop to it. Seems

to me that he ought to be gettin' tired of bein' thrown an' knocked about."

"Tired!" broke in Slim in tones of disgust, "you can't tire him; he'd throw a house off his back."

In a few minutes the broncho was ready for Jack, who hopped neatly into the saddle. He at once bent down, patted the animal, and spoke kindly to him. The broncho was tired; he had been used roughly, and no attempt whatever had been made to conciliate him. It is possible that those pauses before he commenced his antics were in the nature of overtures to his would-be conquerors. At least, so Jack had thought, and he believed that a little kindly treatment would prove an effective aid to breaking him.

"Steady, old man," he whispered to him; "play no dirty tricks on me and I'll treat you well. You've had a rough time up to now, but you have no need to be ashamed of yourself. If you let me stay on your back for a few minutes I'll see that you're treated well."

Now if the broncho did not understand the words, he seemed to appreciate the sentiments. The wild, wicked look gave place to one almost of benevolence. He seemed to be trying hard

to reconcile himself to the new and strange experience of having some one seated astride on his back, and to the irritating piece of iron that had been thrust in his mouth.

This rider did not enrage him by pulling at it, and he refrained from annoying him by digging into his ribs. Instead he stroked him gently and coaxed him to behave himself. After all they were not *all* enemies, so he responded to these overtures. He broke into a trot, but held himself ready in case he had made a mistake in trusting this stranger.

Jack made no attempt to restrain him, and allowed him to trot around the corral at his will. After a few minutes of this the broncho stopped voluntarily, and Jack slipped out of the saddle and proceeded to make a fuss over him, patting him and whispering kind things into his ear. Highly strung beast that he was, he accepted these approaches with confidence, and allowed Jack to lead him round.

"Well, sirree," exclaimed Slim, "now if that don't beat the band. That boy must understand horse talk, for that brute's as gentle as a lamb with him."

The amazement on the faces of the boys look-

ing on, most of whom had had an unforgettable experience of the broncho's viciousness, was really comical to see. They were too surprised to say anything. A broncho was something to be fought, and it was this constant tussling with them that was the fascination that made them love their profession.

The idea that occasionally one of these wild things from the plains could be subdued merely by kindness had never occurred to them. It was a novelty to them, and after they had got over their surprise they became frankly amused at the idea.

"How did you manage him, Jack?" asked Jones.

"I only treated him with decent kindness, which nobody else seemed to have thought of doing," replied Jack.

"Well, it's unusual, Jack, to say the least."

"Yes, I agree with you there, Joe, but he's an unusual horse, and I don't suppose many of them would give you time to speak kindly to them. In my opinion horses are a good deal like human beings; you've got to decide your attitude toward them before you approach them. Now I saw that everybody climbed on to

his back with the one idea of making a fight of it, and when it came to a fight, he had the lot of you beaten to a frazzle."

"Well, I believe you are right, Jack; it's a new idea to me, an' I'll try it one of these days."

"Oh, but you're likely to be disappointed, Joe. He's a broncho in a thousand, and perhaps fighting them is the only way to break the majority of them in."

Just then Chris walked up.

"Pretty soft, eh, Young?" he said. "The brute was only so tired that he hadn't enough life left in him to put up a fight."

"Don't you believe it now," remarked Bill; "that broncho had enough life left in him to throw any three of us off at once."

"I'll bet you five dollars that he won't throw me again," replied Chris, in sneering tones.

"It's a go," remarked Bill, "an' I'll be only too pleased to pay you the money, just to prove that I haven't made a mistake in judging an unusual piece of horseflesh."

As Chris approached the broncho the wicked, vicious look came back into his eyes, and he snorted in a manner that should have warned Chris to forego his attempt. But his pride had

received such a severe blow that he was blind to every thought but the one of reestablishing himself in the eyes of the rest of the boys.

"Better pay up your five dollars and leave him alone," advised Slim. "He don't like you, an' he's a powerful bad enemy to have—least-ways that's my opinion."

"Well, if it's a fight he wants," said Chris, his eyes blazing with fury and a cruel expression settling around his mouth, "I'll oblige him."

"Well, it's your own funeral," replied Slim; "I'm only givin' you an ol' cow-puncher's advice."

So fiercely did the broncho resent this attempt to mount him that he had to be thrown before Chris could get near him. It wasn't a broncho that struggled to his feet; it was a concentrated fury. He made a tremendous rush over toward the corral fence, and shot Chris out of the saddle smash into it. When the boys picked him up he was bleeding and unconscious.

"Here, Young," called out Bill as the broncho lashed out madly at every one that tried to get hold of him. "You are the only one that this here locoed brute has taken a fancy to; see if you can get hold of him."

After a little coaxing the broncho yielded to Jack's persuasions and allowed himself to be led away.

Fortunately Chris had sustained no serious injury. He soon recovered consciousness, and a nasty cut on the forehead was the only bad result of the conflict. The broncho was put under Jack's charge and the understanding between these two became daily more complete. The broncho would allow no one else to approach him, and after Chris's disastrous second attempt to ride him, no one showed the slightest desire to do so.

Each day Jack took him over the prairie for a run, and the way he moved was a delight to the eye of every lover of a horse.

"That horse," remarked Slim, "is a one-man horse."

"I agree with you, Slim," said Mr. McIntosh, who was standing by at the time. "It seems a pity, too, for he's a fine-looking brute, worth any man's three hundred dollars. I'll strike a bargain with Young for him: he's worth next to nothing to me, while he's worth a lot of money to Young. He can have him for fifty dollars."

When the proposition was put up to Jack

he fairly jumped at it, and so the broncho passed into his possession.

"You've got a bargain, Jack," remarked Jones as Jack discussed the matter with him, "but I think he's just a bit too heavy for speed. He's strong, though, and will be just the pony for roping."

"Oh, but you should see him move, Joe," argued Jack. "Why, he'll have the rest of the horses on the Q. Z. miles behind."

"What about the black gelding belonging to the boss's nephew?" asked Jones. "That's a fair record breaker."

"Well, I'd like to have a try-out with him; I think he'll beat him," answered Jack.

"Well, you'll get a chance to do that, for the Fair will soon be along."

"Yes, that's right, and I think he'll lift a prize or two for me."

"Well, I hope so, Jack, and I'll let you hear me shouting for you," answered Jones, as he walked away.

CHAPTER XIII

THE FAIR

THE local Fair was the event of the year for the ranchers and their families, and the event of the Fair was the program of races and competitions for the display of those accomplishments which appealed most readily to all cow-punchers. Although the Fair was only a local one there was a large influx of people from the surrounding districts, especially from the larger towns, and from the city of Calgary, for the display of horsemanship in the various competitions was of such a high order as to provide unsurpassed entertainment for town and city visitors.

The prizes offered were very substantial, but apart from these inducements there was the keenest rivalry among the neighboring ranches, such as usually exists among schools and colleges. There were competitions in roping, riding, and bull-dogging, in addition to the races.

The chief event among the latter was the

pony race confined to riders who were owners of the horses ridden. To own the champion racer in the district was a proud distinction and it always brought out the pick of the horses and the best riders, for the owners were nearly all ranchers or their sons. Apart from the honor attached to winning the race, there was a very nice monetary reward in the shape of a prize of one thousand dollars.

Now Jack, when he heard of this, promptly sent in an entry, and proceeded to devote himself to getting his broncho into the finest possible condition.

Jack had a very serious rival in Chris, whose black gelding was beautifully built for a racer, being small and lighter than Jack's pony. He was full of life and fire, and was certain of the most capable handling. The first year he had been eligible to compete (riders had to be sixteen years of age or over, and must not weigh less than one hundred and thirty pounds) Chris had carried off the prize, which was popularly regarded as the "Blue Ribbon" of the ranchers.

Jack confided his ambitions to Joan, who frequently went with him for whirlwind gallops over the prairie, and she was most enthusiastic and hopeful of his chances. Since the incident

of the cattle rustlers they had been the most loyal of friends and the closest of companions.

"How d'you think my pony will show up against Chris's?" he asked.

"Oh, I'm not too confident," she replied; "that's a wonderful pony he has got, even better than the one he won the race with last year, and he rides so beautifully. Your pony moves splendidly, but seems just a trifle too heavily built for speed."

"Yes, Jones says the same, but he's very deceiving; when he really 'opens up' he goes like the wind, but he so seldom seems inclined to do his best. I'm only hoping he'll make the race one of those rare occasions when he lets himself go."

At last the opening day of the Fair arrived and this was the day on which the race was to be decided. It was glorious autumn weather, and the scene on the spacious Fair grounds was an animated and attractive one. Camped just outside the grounds was the majority of the tribes of Sarcee Indians, who were specially invited by the management to attend. One or two of the events were arranged exclusively for competition among the Indians, and at night the whole of the tribe were to give an exhibi-

tion described on the program as an Indian "powwow," and included the famous Indian war dance. The small town was thronged with visitors, among whom mingled the picturesque figures of the cowboys sporting new neckerchiefs of flaming and dazzling hues. As Jack looked on at this scene he at once understood the ill-concealed eagerness of the boys for the arrival of the Fair; it was the event of the year to them.

In addition to the pony race Jack was entered for the roping competition, for which he was a strong favorite. He was also bracketed with Joan for a display of fancy roping, which was to be one of the concluding events in the day's long program. The two months preceding the Fair had been busy and crowded ones for Jack, and it had only been by hard work and constant application that Joan and he had attained their remarkable skill with the rope.

The program of events began at ten o'clock in the morning, and the first event was a competition for riders. Horses previously unbroken were to provide the test, and for those riders who successfully overcame them a notoriously vicious broncho had been imported for the final test. Among the entrants from the Q. Z. were

Chris and Slim. The former, who seemed to have lost his nerve since he was thrown against the corral fence, was soon obliged to drop out of the competition. He was thrown in his first two attempts. Among the Q. Z. entrants Slim was doing by far the best, and was one of the only two that survived for the final test. The imported broncho well sustained his evil reputation, and the winner of the competition could not stay on his back for more than fifty seconds. Slim, who came second, was dismounted at the end of forty-five.

The next event was the roping competition. Specially selected steers were run into the inclosure, and each competitor in turn had to rope, throw, and tie up a steer in the shortest possible time. When Jack executed this in thirty-eight seconds a rousing cheer greeted his performance and he was declared an easy winner by twelve seconds. He generously attributed his success to the splendid behavior of his pony, which seemed to anticipate every movement required of him.

Then followed one of the most interesting events of the day's proceedings—the "bull-dogging" competition. There were few entries for this, as it was a difficult and dangerous test.

The riders were required to ride alongside of a sturdily built steer, jump on to his neck and, by the exercise of great strength and skill, to throw him. The danger was in getting clear of the steer when throwing him.

The first competitor came to grief in this way. He succeeded in his throw, but for a few moments he was inextricably mixed up with the steer rolling on the ground, and as he did not move when the beast got on to his feet again, assistance was sent to him and he was found to be badly crushed.

Several of the competitors did not succeed in throwing their steer. Jones, who was one of the last to compete, very cleverly dropped on to the back of his steer and threw him, at the same time rolling clear himself. Only three of the competitors succeeded in doing this, so a powerful, heavily built prairie bull was run into the inclosure. The first competitor, after dropping neatly across his neck, wrestled with him for some time but had to give up the attempt to throw him. The second had a similar experience, so that the interest attending Jones's attempt was very keen. There were encouraging yells from the boys from the Q. Z ranch when Jones galloped over toward the bull. "Dog 'im,

Jones," they yelled. It was some time before he could get into position; when he did he dropped across the bull's shoulders, seized his horns, gave them a twist, and in a twinkling the bull was rolling in the dust with Jones well clear of him. It was a very neat and skillful piece of work, and it revealed Jones as a master at this difficult and dangerous art.

The crowd loudly applauded his fine effort and he was deservedly declared the winner. With two of the chief competitions to their credit, the Q. Z. boys were highly pleased with themselves.

The next event was confined to Blood Indians only, and consisted of a bareback relay race, four horses being used in turn by each rider. It was very exciting, and roused even the stolid, phlegmatic Indians to some show of enthusiasm.

Then came what might be termed the classic event of the day—the race for ponies, which has already been referred to. The race was over a distance of one mile and a half, and necessitated covering the oval course twice. Fourteen ponies had been entered, and the majority were splendid specimens of the prairie-bred horse. Jack was very hopeful of his chance. There was a

beautiful bloom on the golden hide of his pony as he led him out on to the course. If he would only show that speed that he was capable of, Jack was sure he would win. But he was rather a willful and moody brute, and had to be coaxed to do his best.

Apart from the interest in the race, it was a very pretty exhibition of horsemanship. Jack's horse was not a favorite, for his temperament was well known. That position was shared by three horses, one of which was Chris's black gelding. But if Jack's horse was not a favorite, he had many well-wishers among the crowd, and his eye had caught the flutter of Joan's handkerchief as she waved to him from the stand.

The arrangements were rather primitive and, as the horses were all high-spirited beasts, the start was very straggling. Jack was one of the last to get off, with the leaders many lengths in front. He held a slack rein just to show his pony that the race was up to him, but when the circuit of the course had been once completed he was last.

The three favorites were fighting it out gallantly in front, with Chris slowly drawing away from the other two. Jack heard the shouts of the crowd as he passed the stand. He lay over

the neck of his pony and whispered to him:

"Come on, old man, don't you know that we're last!—just a little spurt to show that you're made of the real stuff."

His pony pricked up his ears as though he understood and, though more than thirty lengths behind the leaders and with nearly three-quarters of the distance covered, he began to put in his effort. With great, tearing strides he rapidly shortened the gap, and a roar went up from the crowd. Horse after horse he passed until he was on the heels of the foremost horses. Chris was leading by two lengths, with the same distance between the second and third, and it was little more than a hundred yards to the finishing post in front of the stand.

Could he do it? Jack lay across his pony's neck urging him forward. On and on he plunged until he was on the heels of Chris's black gelding and the post was only a few yards away. Then, seeming to ignore Jack's pleadings and entering into the struggle on his own account, he literally threw himself at the post in time to push his head in front of the black gelding's as they passed it together.

It had been a thrilling, remarkable race, and the result was as great a surprise to Jack as to

any one. It was also a great surprise to Chris, who, on looking back after half the distance had been covered, had had the satisfaction of seeing Jack hopelessly in the rear and apparently out of it. He hated both horse and rider, for they had both lowered his pride at different times. When he saw Jack closing in upon him he made a desperate struggle to keep the lead, and only succumbed in the last few strides. He took his beating with very bad grace, and this was responsible for an incident which gave an added thrill to a memorable event. As they passed the post and rode along side by side for some yards, he raised his quirt and deliberately slashed Jack across the face. Stung and maddened by pain, Jack threw his feet out of the stirrups, sprang on to the black gelding's back, and wrestled with Chris. The gelding bucked and threw them both, and the struggle was continued on the grass until some of the boys ran up and separated them.

Fortunately the incident had escaped the notice of the crowd, though it was not very long before the news of it was whispered around. When Mr. McIntosh heard of it he went into a towering rage and swore that his nephew would not be allowed to stay another day on the ranch.

Jones had been one of the first to reach the two boys struggling on the ground, and the way he had thrown Chris to one side expressed the disgust he felt with him.

As Jack got to his feet he at once shook hands with him.

"Fine, Jack boy, fine," he remarked enthusiastically, "but how on earth did you persuade your pony to put in a run like that?"

"Didn't have to persuade him, Joe; I only whispered to him, and the way he shot ahead was as great a surprise to me as to any one."

"Well, it was a fine effort and worth watching—which is more than I can say about what happened afterward. The dirty skunk," he continued, with emphasis, "he can't take a licking in any shape or form, and I don't know how I kept my hands off him."

"Well, you did me no good trun by dragging us apart, Joe."

"I know how you feel about it, but that kind of thing doesn't go well in public. You can console yourself with the fact that you are a thousand dollars richer over the race."

"Yes; a little nearer to getting the J. J. ranch Joe, eh?"

"Yes, but it's you who are getting all the

coin, Jack; about time I got a hustle on."

"Oh, you'll easily win the five thousand dollars prize for bull-doggin', Joe; nobody can touch you at that," concluded Jack enthusiastically.

One of the most interesting and spectacular events of the day was provided by the exhibition of fancy roping given by Joan and Jack. Joan rode around the inclosure while Jack, by the exercise of great skill and dexterity, kept the lasso encircling her but without touching her. It was a fine piece of work and generously appreciated by a critical crowd, which became wildly enthusiastic when Joan performed the same feat with Jack as the rider.

The last event of the day was a "powwow" by the Indians. They assembled on a large platform erected for the purpose, with the "squaws" forming the outer circle and the braves within. In the center was a drum, around which were the "musicians"—two or three of the young braves who beat on it. At first they commenced very slowly and softly, accompanying the raps with a weird sort of chant, more like the steady drone of bees. The squaws on the outside shuffled round, making a scraping noise with their feet, and a movement

with their bodies, which resembled an old-fashioned curtsy. They also hummed in tune with the musicians.

The painted braves, who were the star performers of the show, then started gliding movements, each one imitating the animal whose spirit he imagined himself to possess. The wolf being a great tribal favorite, the majority of them commenced snarling and clawing at the air, and occasionally at each other's hair.

As the dance progressed the tom-tom was rattled with increasing vigor, and the barks and snarls and clawings of the "wolves" increased correspondingly, while the old ladies on the outside bobbed more frequently and shuffled more noisily until perfect pandemonium reigned. Then gradually the rappings on the tom-tom became fewer and less noisy, until they finally ceased.

The spectators looked on good-humoredly and applauded generously, highly amused at the apparently maniacal movements of the red men. But the latter treated the powwow as a religious ceremonial and frowned at the hilarity of the white onlookers. Each dance had its own particular significance, and was announced separately, but it could not be distinguished from all previous ones by any new movements

on the part of the dancers, excepting that they sometimes went the other way round, or clawed with the left hand first instead of the right. The white onlookers, unable to appreciate the fine points in the dances, though enjoying the novelty of them, were, without intending it, making themselves very offensive to the red men, and, in consequence, as dance followed dance the frenzied movements and sounds of the performers increased. Mr. McIntosh was one of the first to perceive that the old fighting spirit of the red man was being aroused, and that the old antagonism to the white man was being excited. He dropped a hint to men with their families present, and the women were hurried off home. He also warned the boys (who good-naturedly cheered louder as the shrieks of the dancers became wilder) that they had better stay in case trouble started.

As one of those responsible for the management of the Fair, he advised that the Indians be ordered to cease dancing at once and return to their encampments near by.

This order of the committee was ignored by the Indians, who, to the alarm of the older men present, replied by starting up the war dance. This was like a spark to tinder; the old passions and battle lust of the Indians flared up,

and terrifying, blood-curdling shrieks rent the air, while the dancers went through all the motions of scalping. The squaws, alive to the situation, deserted in large numbers and disappeared into the darkness.

Mr. McIntosh held a hurried consultation with other members of the committee, and it was decided to charge into the frenzied, shrieking Indians and disperse them.

The boys entered into this with great glee. After firing a volley into the air, they charged on to the platform and commenced cracking the skulls of the Indians with the butt ends of their revolvers. The musicians came in for a real rough time, the tom-tom being quickly put out of commission. The braves soon melted away into the darkness and sought the safety of their own encampment, with all their warlike passions effectively quenched.

The following day, at the pressing invitation of the management, they returned to their reserve, with the assurance that they would not again be required to display their abilities for the entertainment of unenlightened white men.

CHAPTER XIV

THE GREAT STAMPEDE

THE day following the Fair Mr. McIntosh was as good as his word, and Chris was told to pack up and go. This he did with a very bad grace. At the last moment he sought to change Mr. McIntosh's attitude toward him, but the rancher was obdurate.

Apart from the unsportsmanlike conduct of Chris in his dealings with Jack, the rancher knew that he was keeping bad company, and was frequenting the saloon in the town more often than was good for a lad. He had remonstrated with him, but without avail, and had previously threatened to turn him off the ranch unless he mended his ways. Then came the incident of the race, which was the direct cause of Mr. McIntosh's decision to pack Chris off. He had given him every opportunity to make good, but Chris had persistently abused his privileges, and had paid no heed to the appeals made to him.

The rancher fully believed that, working for

some one who would be strict with him, and where he would be on the same footing as the rest of the riders, Chris would pull himself together. So Chris rode over to the Three-Bar ranch and secured a job as a rider.

Though Mr. McIntosh had been obdurate to all the appeals and arguments of his nephew, he really did not like seeing the boy go, and after he had secured a job on the Three-Bar, he rode over and had a chat with Wheeler, the owner of the ranch.

The result was that Chris found himself under very severe and strict discipline, and gradually be reconciled himself to confining his interest chiefly to his work. A gradual separation from many undesirable companions followed, together with a growing appreciation of the kindness and privileges he had so deliberately abused.

Mr. McIntosh was quick to see the change in him, and confided to his wife the hopes he had that Chris would eventually make good. It was obvious that the lad was changed, for he made friendly approaches to Jack and frankly apologized for the lamentable exhibition in the Fair grounds.

Jack was too good-natured to harbor any ill

feeling, and so it came about that they were frequently seen riding together.

"What's all this friendliness between you and Chris?" asked Jones of Jack one night.

"Oh, I don't much understand it myself," replied Jack; "he's sorry over the race affair, and altogether seems to me to be pretty decent."

"Well, I hope he means it all, Jack, for if he's playing any underhand game on you he'd better look out, for I'll be after him in less time than it takes a rattler to shake his rattles."

But Jones had no need to be afraid of Chris's intentions toward Jack; he was really changed and genuinely anxious to wipe out the memories of his former bad spirit. He had never dreamed that Mr. McIntosh would carry out his expressed intention to send him off, so that when he did so it came as a severe shock to him.

The experience of working for a man who treated him the same as the other boys was a wholesome corrective to Chris, and he began to realize what the abuse of his position and privileges had brought him. As soon as he came to his senses he decided to amend and win his way back into the good graces of his uncle. He knew that his treatment of Jack had been particularly

distasteful to Mr. McIntosh, and he also realized that the only decent thing to do was to apologize to Jack, and to show by his conduct that he was genuinely sorry and ashamed of himself.

So it came about that a real friendship sprang up between the two boys, for Jack was quick to forget and forgive, and showed, as he always did, a generous appreciation of the skill of Chris in handling horses.

But Jack's time was not wholly spent in Chris's company, for he found time to develop the warm friendship he felt for Joan, and they had many enjoyable and thrilling rides together over the spacious prairie.

The prevailing topic at this time was the coming Stampede at Calgary. Thousands of dollars were to be distributed in prizes, and the Stampede was to last for a period of five days. It was one of the biggest things of its kind that had been attempted on the American continent, and men world-famed for their abilities as riders were to compete. To Jack and Jones the Stampede meant a great deal more than to most, for, apart from their sporting interest in it, they regarded it as a serious business proposition. It was their one great chance

to get sufficient capital to purchase a ranch, and they were determined to develop their skill to such an extent as to make them serious competitors for the generous prizes offered.

It was a great tribute to Jack's persistence to find himself regarded as the hope of the "foothills" ranchers for the roping competition. By constant practice he had reached the stage of perfection which had so easily secured for him the prize for roping at the local Fair, and this, accomplished with such ease, had marked him out as a possible winner of the competition at the Stampede. And in showing their confidence in him they were backed up by the management of the Stampede, who sent an invitation to Jack and Joan to give an exhibition of roping.

If Jack was the choice of the district for roping, Jones was as strong a favorite for the bulldogging competition. Added to his skill, Jones had the advantage of a splendid physique, and it needed strength as well as skill to come through the competition successfully.

The interest of the ranchers in the coming Stampede, and their desire to see local talent triumph in what were really world competitions, took a practical shape.

At a meeting called together for this purpose it was decided that all of those competing at the Stampede should be released, as far as possible, from their ordinary duties on the ranch. And, for the benefit of those in the riding competitions, the most difficult horses to ride were pooled so that every one should have an equal chance to test his skill and to increase his confidence.

"Well, Jack," remarked Jones when he heard of the decision of the ranchers, "all I can say is that they're the finest bunch of sports I've ever met, and if we don't make good at the Stampede it'll be no fault of theirs."

"No, nor of ours, Joe, for I'm all out to win."

"The same here, Jack, not forgetting that if we win we'll be a small matter of eight thousand dollars to the good."

This decision of the ranchers gave the competitors four clear weeks in which to prepare. Jack, who was quick to take advantage of this privilege, was never tired of practicing the difficult art of roping, and gave the young steers on the Q. Z. ranch a rough time, for he was continually riding in among them, roping and throwing one of their number, while Jones timed him. He was able to do it regularly in

thirty-three seconds, and once got it down to thirty-one.

"Keep that up, Jack, and nothing will beat you," remarked Jones encouragingly.

Then Jones would take a turn at his specialty—bull-dogging. He would ride in among the cattle, then pick out the swiftest and heftiest-looking steer, ride alongside of him for some time, leap nimbly across his shoulders, grasp his horns, give them a twist, and crash! the steer would go down, rolling over and over on the prairie. Jack would applaud enthusiastically.

"Say, Joe, but nothing will stand up to you if you treat 'em all as rough as that."

Chris occasionally rode out with them, and his warm friendliness and encouragement were in pleasing contrast to his former surliness. He was practicing for the bronchobusting competition, and entered into his training with heart and soul.

"That boy has changed," Mr. McIntosh remarked to his wife; "if only he keeps it up I'll have him back and give him an interest in the ranch."

At last the long-looked-forward-to opening day of the Stampede arrived, and there was great excitement at the ranch houses, for there

was to be a "trek" from the foothills into Calgary, only sufficient men being left behind to do the necessary duties. It was ardently hoped that more than one world's championship would be brought back to the "foothills."

The city of Calgary was *en fete*, and cow-punchers from Texas and Montana jostled one another in the streets. Elaborate preparations had been made for those who wished to attend the Stampede. On the opening day a huge crowd of forty thousand assembled.

The bronchobusting competition, having the most entries, was carried on simultaneously with other competitions, and it was not expected that the winner would be declared before the end of the fourth day. The bull-dogging competition was expected to last over the first two days, while the roping competition was arranged for the third and fourth days. The fifth and last day was to be mainly devoted to exhibition riding by the winners of the competitions.

Bronchos renowned for their vicious qualities had been specially imported for the riding tests, and the spectators were highly entertained by some thrilling duels between horses and riders. The bronchos invariably had some

little surprise for each rider, and there was a rapid weeding out of the unskillful.

The riders from "across the border" made the best showing on the first day, the only Canadian to survive the first test being an Indian.

In the bull-dogging competition Jones had his first test and came through it easily, though three-fourths of the competitors came to grief. By the end of the second day all the foothills representatives in the riding competitions had come to grief, Chris and Slim among them, though both had put up a game fight and had nearly succeeded.

"Well, sirree," remarked Slim in talking over his experiences in the competition, "you might as well hev tried to ride a streak of lightning' or to sit on a barrel of lighted dynamite as to keep your seat on that piece of devil flesh."

The second day's proceedings secured the first championship for the foothills, and Jones was the hero. In the concluding stage of the bull-dogging competition, there were only fourteen survivors of the first day's tests. A powerful, vicious-looking wild steer, a "maverick," long-horned and red-eyed, was run into the inclosure, and his demeanor and antics were so hostile that two of the fourteen gracefully

declined combat. Of the remaining twelve Jones was the sixth to compete, and the steer, up to that time, had easily resisted all attempts to put him down. But the succession of attempts had irritated and annoyed him so that when Jones began his attempt the steer was in an ugly temper. He disdained to move when Jones rode over to him, and it took the united efforts of three other riders to persuade him into a run. Jones followed alongside, and lost no time in getting across the steer's shoulders. Then followed a thrilling struggle for mastery.

"Dog 'im, cowboy," yelled the crowd, wildly excited.

The steer first of all made vicious attempts to throw Jones, and it required all his strength and skill to hang on. He then went careering madly across the inclosure, while Jones, with a hand on each horn, struggled grimly and with tenacious strength, not only to retain his place across the steer's shoulders but also to force his head down until he finally toppled over. Slowly but surely the steer's head was forced down lower and gradually lower until, with his head pushed in between his front legs, he somersaulted over, Jones barely escaping being crushed underneath him. It was a magnificent

struggle, and Jones received a tremendous ovation as he walked out of the inclosure. A fresh steer, equally powerful, was run into the inclosure and defied the efforts of the remaining competitors, so that Jones was declared the winner of the competition and the five thousand dollars in prize money.

To the great delight of the crowd, he insisted on trying conclusions with the undefeated steer, and again he triumphed after another thrilling but not quite so lengthy a struggle. He had well won, and his face was beaming with delight when Jack congratulated him.

"Jack, boy," he called out as Jack approached, "what price the J. J. ranch now?"

"Looks good, Joe, thanks to you, and nobody can deny but what you're a real champion."

The next day was the first day of the roping competition, in which Jack was one of the youngest competitors. It was remarkable to think that, less than two years ago, Jack had not known what roping was, and now he was competing against the greatest ropers in the world. His wonderful proficiency was the simple result of hard work and application, allied to a quick eye and strong wrists. He was a trifle nervous when answering to his name in

the roll of competitors, for after Jones had triumphed so splendidly he was doubly anxious to secure chief honors, and with them the three thousand dollars in prize money.

Each competitor had to ride out, rope, throw, and tie his steer, the one performing it in the shortest time being awarded the prize. Up to about halfway through the competition the best time was thirty-eight seconds, and this was returned in three cases. Shortly afterward this was easily beaten by an old experienced cowpuncher from Montana, who returned the splendid time of thirty-three seconds. Jack was one of the last to compete, and as he rode into the inclosure, the cynosure of thousands of eyes, his heart beat wildly with excitement. He knew he was up against one of the most difficult things he had attempted, and he figured his rope nervously, waiting for the word to go. At last it came, and he shot out his horse into the center of the inclosure in pursuit of his steer, at the same time swinging his rope ready for the throw at the first favorable opportunity. Faced with the record of thirty-three seconds he could not afford to wait, and made the throw at a dead gallop. In doing so he knew that he risked every-

thing, and the vast crowd momentarily held its breath while awaiting the result. The rope was sent a few feet ahead of the stampeding steer, and was so beautifully timed that he ran his head right into it. Jack pulled up his horse, at the same time wheeling him around until he was facing away from the steer. Not waiting for the rope to become taut he sprang out of the saddle, relying on his pony to get the steer on to his back, which he did, while Jack ran like a deer toward the steer. With deft and sure fingers he tied the feet of the fallen beast, then held up his hand signifying that he was finished.

A hasty inspection of his work followed, and then the time was announced—thirty-three seconds! He had made a tie of it! The crowd roared out its delight, for it had taken this stripling to its heart.

At the conclusion of the day only two competitors were left in, Jack being one of them. A few others took part the following morning, but none of them succeeded in approaching the record of thirty-three seconds, so that the final decision rested between Jack and the old cow-puncher from Montana. It was set down as the star turn on the afternoon's program and aroused tremendous interest. The foothills con-

tingent mustered in force in clamorous support of Jack.

"No need to say anything to encourage you," remarked Jones shortly before Jack rode into the inclosure, "but I believe you'll win."

Just then Chris came over. "Best wishes, Jack," he called out genially; "we're all hoping to see you win, and we believe you can do it."

"That boy's changed, Jack," said Jones as Chris turned and walked away; "if he keeps it up he'll grow into a white man yet. A final shake, Jack—keep your head and you'll win right enough."

The old cow-puncher waited impatiently for the word to start. He had received a shock when Jack had equaled his time, and he was astonished at the youthfulness of his rival for chief honors. He was a good sport, though, and smiled pleasantly as Jack pulled up alongside of him.

A few seconds later he dashed out in pursuit of his steer, and the time returned was the same as before—thirty-three seconds. At the word "go" Jack galloped after his steer to the accompaniment of a roar of encouragement from the huge crowd. A groan of suspense was

heard as, for a brief second, it seemed as if Jack had missed his steer, which was followed by a frantic cheer as they saw he was safely roped. The steer safely trussed up, Jack held up his hand—thirty-three seconds! Another tie!

The crowd yelled its delight at the prospect of another duel between these two amazing ropers.

It was decided to toss up as to who should have the choice of competing first, and Jack won. He decided to take his chance at once. He was keyed up by nervous excitement and knew that he could never hope to be in a better condition to do himself justice. The steer was released and went careering wildly across the inclosure. At the same time Jack heard the word "go." His horse seemed to have entered into the spirit of the thing and tore after the steer at a great pace. Jack shot out his rope, making a beautiful throw. Then he took a chance. So confident was he that his throw was a perfect one that he did not wait for the rope to touch the steer, trusting to the intelligence of his pony to do the rest. He slipped out of the saddle and was almost on top of the steer when he crashed to the ground. His pony had wheeled at the right moment. Frantic cheers went up

from the crowd when they realized what a daring chance Jack had taken, and when the time was announced—thirty seconds—they redoubled their cheering. It was the neatest, the most skillful and daring piece of work that had been seen during the whole of the Stampede to date.

The old cow-puncher was a fighter, though, and he made a great effort to beat the time returned, but failed by two seconds, so that Jack was returned the winner. He was cheered to the echo as he rode out of the inclosure, and was fairly mobbed by the Q. Z. boys.

"You are right there with the goods, Jack," called out Jones; and Slim was heard to say, "Well, sirree, if that boy'd tried a few more times he'd uv done it in less than no time."

When the excitement had died down and Jack and Jones were alone, the latter began to show alarming symptoms of apoplexy, so that Jack asked in tones of great concern:

"For goodness' sake what's wrong with you, Joe?"

Jones gave a great gulp, and then began to explain. "I've just bought an option on the slickest little ranch in Alberta, Jack, and I've been fairly bustin' to tell you about it."

"Well, all I can say is that I'm awfully glad

you got the chance when you did; a few more minutes with all that in you, Joe, and I'm sure you'd have passed out."

"You know that little ranch house by the river—a pretty place right in among the trees and about ten miles southwest of the Q. Z.?"

"Yes, I know the place you mean, Joe."

"Well, I've put down two hundred and fifty dollars this mornin' for an option on it lastin' ten days. I was fairly dying to tell you about it before the competition came off, but thought it might upset your nerve a little with so much at stake; but I was plumb sure you'd win, Jack."

"What's the price and terms, Joe?"

"Twelve thousand dollars—five thousand down and the balance in three years. There's a section of land goes with the ranch house and buildings, and along with it a fifteen years' lease on another two thousand acres, at a yearly rent of five hundred dollars—dirt cheap, and the chance of a lifetime. That leaves us five thousand dollars to buy up stock, and in fifteen years you'll be able to retire a wealthy man."

"Hurrah!" yelled Jack, throwing his Stetson into the air, "good for you, Joe. At last there's going to be a J. J. ranch."

"You bet your life, Jack, and she's goin' to go, too."

It was decided to go and look over the ranch as soon as the Stampede finished. "And then we'll cinch it with five thousand dollars. With the remainder we can buy between one hundred and fifty and two hundred head of cattle—a nice little bunch to start with," said Jones.

Then they went back to watch the finals for the bronchobusting competition. The Indian rider was the only Canadian competitor left in. He was riding when they reached the inclosure, and was seated on a regular outlaw of the prairie, which fairly catapulted itself into the center of the ring. Holding loosely in his left hand the halter rope—for "busting" was done without the aid of a bridle—this stoical Indian took a succession of bucks and twists in a manner that called forth the clamorous approbation of the crowd.

"Bust 'im, Indian!" yelled the crowd. A thrilling struggle followed, but in spite of the violent contortions of the broncho, the Indian maintained his seat and was declared the winner of the competition, to the frantic delight of the Canadian cow-punchers.

The following day Jack, along with Jones

and the other winners, gave exhibitions of their powers. In the evening, with the huge stadium brilliantly lighted, Joan and Jack gave their exhibition of trick and fancy roping that fairly brought down the house; so ended what had been the most brilliantly successful episode in Jack's adventurous career.

"Joan," he said to her as they walked back to the stables with their horses, "Jones and I have practically bought a ranch; hope you'll come to see us some time."

"How splendid!" replied Joan enthusiastically; "what a wonderful pair of friends you two are. Of course I'll come as often as I dare, but how sorry we shall be to lose you."

Just then they heard steps behind them; it was Mr. McIntosh.

"Dad," called out Joan, "I've got some great news for you. Jack and Jones have bought a ranch."

"That's no news, Joan, for I've heard all about it. Jack, my boy," he said, "I want to congratulate you on your pluck and perseverance. I knew you'd make good, and sorry though I am to lose you two boys, I'm mighty pleased to be able to shake you by the hand and wish you both the best of luck."

"Thank you, Mr. McIntosh," replied Jack with some emotion; "the Q. Z. has been a real home to me, and I can never forget that if I have made good my thanks are due entirely to you."

"Forget it, boy, forget it. Come on with your pintos, you two; we're riding back to the Q. Z. to-night."

